









**A CENTURY OF  
LOVE STORIES**

*Uniform with this volume*

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- A CENTURY OF CREEPY  
STORIES
- A CENTURY OF HUMOUR  
*Edited by* P. G. WODEHOUSE
- THE EVENING STANDARD BOOK  
OF STRANGE STORIES
- A CENTURY OF SEA STORIES  
*Edited by* RAFAEL SABATINI
- A CENTURY OF DETECTIVE  
STORIES

A  
Century  
of  
LOVE STORIES

Edited by  
GILBERT FRANKAU

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## PREFACE

THAT valuable authority, Benham, whose work should be on every novelist's and every journalist's desk, is reticent about the slogan, "All the world loves a lover". The quotation there given is, "All mankind love a lover", and the author of the line as Emerson; who was, as some of you will no doubt remember, a philosopher of considerable repute in Boston, Massachusetts.

But Emerson has been dead a very long time.

My own experience, indeed, tends to prove the exact opposite of the statement on which he relies. For myself I infinitely prefer Shakespeare's "We that are true lovers, run into strange capers", with the addition that these strange capers bring us far more often to mankind's ridicule than to its love.

Modern mankind, and more especially modern woman-kind—it seems to me—have grown rather cynical about this particular emotion which old-time poets and philosophers used to call "love". Many of my younger colleagues, in fact—that is to say if I read them rightly—treat this particular emotion as though it were a disease.

They, unless I misjudge them, would rather diagnose the causes of love—and thereafter deal with it therapeutically—than treat it as a permanent and eradicable human complex. They appear to resent, and with increasing fury, the fact that we should have been "created male and female".

Yet as long as we remain so created how can any literary craftsman who would hold up his mirror to life as it is (and not to life as he or she would like it to be) let the "love interest" go altogether by.

There are men and women, I am quite willing to admit, who are not, and never have been, and never will be under the influence of "the doubtful pleasure". But that all such people are abnormal, I am quite certain—and that any of them are happy, in a major way, I beg leave to doubt.

There are, of course, *minor* emanations of happiness. Some of us, for instance, find satisfaction in great respon-



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sibilities ; others of us in throwing off our responsibilities. There is a "kick", as we moderns call it, in the possession of money, in the gratifying of ambition, and above all in the exercise of power. The thrill of speed, the thrill of sport, the thrill of games, the thrill of desperate adventure—all these have their delights for some of us.

Nevertheless is there any delight comparable with the mental and physical satisfaction *shared* by the boy and girl, by the man and woman who are truly one ?

I write "mental and physical" of set purpose—and even at the risk of shocking the over-susceptible. Because the one quality which distinguishes Man from all other animals on this planet is that he, and he alone, possesses both intellect and body. And it is only when his bodily and his intellectual forces are in exact, and exactly balanced correlation that he can be considered complete.

No man, and more particularly no woman, can live by the intellect alone. "My mind to me a kingdom", or, "My mind to me an empire", or, "My mind's my kingdom", (all of which are accurate quotations) represent no philosophy at all. Such a rule for living would be a negation of all philosophy. It would discount sentiment—which is a very different thing from sentimentality; and, practiced to its logical conclusion, would reduce us either to impotence or to the level of the beasts.

It has been suggested in at least one modern novel and by at least one modern philosopher that future ages will relegate the emotion we now call "love" to the scrapheap ; and that the reproduction of our species will then be conducted in the laboratory without any physiological or psychological processes.

It has been suggested that even if the entire sex motive cannot be eradicated from human nature it can be scientifically mechanized and eugenically controlled !

In which eventuality I can well imagine the last copy of the collection of stories I am here introducing being either publicly burned or privately treasured as the supreme exhibition of "love idiocy" as displayed by pre-intellectual Man.

Seriously though, can one imagine such a world ? Is it possible to conceive such a race of beings ? And, even if the eventuality is possible, would they be *human* beings ?

The answer is not in doubt.

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As long as we remain human, so long must we go on loving ; so long must the sex motive be the prime motive—because, without it, there can be no reproduction of our species—in every storyteller's tale.

I dislike that word "sex" more than I dislike any other word in our language. To call a writer a "sex novelist" seems to me almost the greatest insult that any critic can apply to a man or woman of my own craft. Indeed there is only one insult greater—and that is to call a literary craftsman or craftswoman "sexless".

For to be sexless is to be inhuman ; and the inhuman writer is not a writer at all.

"There ain't no such animal" as an altogether sexless writer. Barring only the abstract sciences there is no subject which a man's or a woman's pen may approach with complete disregard of the sex motive. The historian who leaves that motive out of his calculations will never write a true history. While for the writer of fiction it is the very staff of his literary life.

All of which—now that I have read it over—sounds faintly highbrow ; and, I am afraid, a little as though I were trying to justify the many authors whose stories you will read here. For the stories which follow are openly and blatantly and unashamedly love stories. Yet that they need either excuse or justification, *qua* such, I refuse to admit. Any more than I am prepared to admit that they are "sex" stories in the colloquial sense of that peculiarly loathsome word.

They are merely stories, taken here, chosen there, yet not chosen altogether at random, in which the average reader will, I believe, find at least some tolerable reflections of his or her own feelings, of his or her own attitude to, of his or her own thoughts about that particular mental and physical emotion which we must still call, having no better name for it, "love".

And with that, perhaps, I should leave you, average reader, to their perusal. Yet the opportunity of writing just a little more on this very vexed subject of love, and more particularly on the love motive as it affects the modern story teller, seems too good to be missed. I cannot, in fact, bring myself to conclude this introduction—a slightly presumptuous introduction, as it seems to me when I consider the superior eminence of some of the literary names I am introducing—

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without obtruding my personal views on this very vexed subject in so far as they have hitherto affected my own work.

My own views then, very briefly, are these.

I hold that love—using the word in its accepted sense—being the forerunner of birth, cannot possibly be excluded from any novel or any story which attempts to depict life whole.

I hold that it is the novelist's duty—even if it be not his pleasure, for there are many things which I personally find far more interesting to write about—to depict love as he sees it at work on the lives of others, and as he feels it at work in his own.

I believe that the novelist who does not study, and constantly, the peculiarly intricate relation between the mental and the physical aspects of love will never succeed in creating living characters; and that his work will be unconvincing, the very worst fault which any literary craftsman's work can display.

Further, I believe that love, if not the mainspring, is at any rate the hairspring of average character—and that even the most frigid of us are infinitely more affected by Nature's apparently insensate craving for the reproduction of our species than we know.

Even holding to that last belief, however—and holding, as I do, that the word "shocking" should be banished from our colloquial vocabulary—I maintain that the love interest in any novel or any short story, however strong it is, must be, and *can be*, treated with a certain decency and a certain reserve.

But may our critics and our public alike save us from overmuch decency and overmuch reserve—from that sterile and spinsterly censorship of the written word which is even now reducing Hollywood to the purest common denominator of "Lord Fauntleroy", "Little Women" and "Alice in Wonderland".

Rather than that give me Rabelais and the Contes Drolatiques every time.

GILBERT FRANKAU.

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I. A. R. WYLIE

*Pas de Quatre*

Miss Wylie was educated at Cheltenham Ladies' College and at various schools in France and Belgium. She has published over a hundred short stories and sixteen novels and books of travel, her most recent being *A Feather in her Hat* and *To the Vanquished*.





## PAS DE QUATRE

### I

DOCTOR ROSSLYN waited until the consultant physician had climbed into his car. Then he closed the door and went back up the broad, shallow staircase. He reflected that though the consultant was an able diagnostician there were some things he hadn't discovered in this particular case. He hadn't guessed, for instance, what lay behind his younger colleague's professional gravity. And yet Rosslyn felt that the truth had been staring out of his eyes—emanating from his whole body.

The old man had merely patted him on the back.

"You look as though you wanted a holiday, my dear fellow."

Doctors always ordered people holidays. Rosslyn had done it himself repeatedly, especially when at a loss. He saw now how absurd it was, and how ironically his patients must have smiled to themselves.

He went slowly. It had been a great strain. Now it was over. Of course he had known. At the bottom of their hearts everyone had known. She herself had been the least self-deceiving of any of them. He remembered the compassionate, enigmatic smile with which she had met his cheerful protestations and Digby's incessant plan-making.

Poor Digby! He spent his life dragging one bankrupt business after another into prosperity, and he simply couldn't believe that circumstances might be too much for him. Such a lovable, pathetic ass!

Throughout, as far as Rosslyn knew, she had never flinched. If she woke at night to stare into the blackness and face the incredible, monstrous event that was drawing down upon her, by the next morning she had recovered her

absolute serenity. She was wonderful—so wonderful as to be puzzling. He had seen many people take the final verdict—most of them with courage—but none of them had attained the quality of her peace. It was as though she had some sweet and secret comfort—a source of strength which she kept jealously hidden from them all. Sometimes she seemed deeply happy. Whatever it was, it made it easier to go back to her.

Digby was out. He didn't know about the consultant physician. They had treated him frankly as a child. In the end she would have to comfort him.

The room had been left in broad daylight. It was like a windless garden, the still air heavy with the scent of flowers, the Persian rugs floating their shadowy colours in a silently flowing tide of sunshine. The low, graceful Regency bed might have been a pretty boat moored in a dim backwater.

Doctor Rosslyn went across to the open windows and drew the curtains. It wasn't that he was afraid to meet her eyes. But he wanted the intimacy of quiet and twilight. The room was too full of luxury. He would have liked to strip it bare so that he could be alone with her. Queer to think that in a little time he would not come here any more—that the short hours which made the centre and meaning of his day would be cut out.

"Well?"

The small voice just stirred the silence. He came at once and sat down on the edge of her bed. He knew that she had been watching him, drawing on those silent reserves of hers, and now he looked straight at her, grave but untroubled. He could not and would not insult her courage, and their understanding of each other, by an evasion. She laid her thin dry hand on his, pressing it gently.

"Well—how long?"

"He doesn't know exactly. A few weeks—perhaps two months."

She was silent a moment, reflecting.

"Thank you, Stephen."

She had never called him by his Christian name before. It astonished him somehow that she realized he had such a thing—that he had a personality outside his job of keeping people alive. It had sounded very sweet, very deliberate. He sat there, his head bent, listening, as though the sound

lingered somewhere in the stillness. He guessed that it had meant a great deal to her—that she had waited and waited, and now the signal had been given, and a fast-closed door thrown wide.

"How long have we known each other?" she asked in her little far-off voice.

"About two years."

"You've looked after me all that time—fought like a Trojan, haven't you?"

"Well—I'm beaten now."

"It doesn't matter. You've been perfect. I'd like to call you Stephen, if you don't mind. My name's Claire, you know. It seems rather silly for dying people to be so formal, don't you think? That sort of thing doesn't matter any more."

He held her hand close. He felt certain that she knew, and that she was saying: "Never mind. It's all right now." He was amazed to find that he was happy—extraordinarily happy, like someone who had been bound hand and foot and then suddenly set free. He sat up straight, involuntarily drawing the first deep breath of release. The colour that had flooded up into his thin, hard-bitten face made him look young and slightly pathetic, as all strong people look when overwhelmed by a rare feeling. She smiled at him almost lightly, as though she were teasing him a little.

"Aren't you glad?"

"Glad?"

"That it's all over, that we're quite certain."

"I don't know."

"And that nothing matters except the truth?"

He considered her with his usual uncompromising steadfastness. She lay back deep among her pillows. The exhaustion that had followed on the consultation had thrown black hollows into her cheeks and deepened the lines about her mouth. She wasn't beautiful. He had never known her beautiful. By the time she had come to him, two years ago, disease had already laid her youth and a famous loveliness in ruins. That, it had seemed to him at the time, had been her greatest tragedy. Digby himself had spoken of it, tears in his eyes.

"It's awful—you can't understand—you never saw her."

He was glad he had never seen her—grimly proud of a

love illicit and stifled as it was—that had grown up out of such rare, clean soil. Other people had loved the beautiful, happy Claire Calvert, but he had loved the disfigured, suffering woman. He remembered the day of their first meeting quite well. She had come into his consulting room and he had scarcely looked at her. Women—people generally—meant nothing to him. A patient was either a sick body or a sick ego. He was, in fact, a hard man, a fighter who had chosen disease as his enemy, and the fight was all that he cared about. He had never loved anyone in his life.

He had taken Claire Calvert's hands. They were dry and withered—just symptoms. He had made the examination with the cold carefulness of a detective gathering his clues, and at last had told her the truth, as far as he knew it. Then for the first time he had met her eyes—those curious, shining, hazel eyes of hers. Perhaps unconsciously he had expected horror, consternation, tears. And she had just smiled reassuringly at him.

"Please don't worry about me, doctor."

He hadn't been worrying. She had been nothing to him. But now a shock of sheer admiration had gone over him. He had recognized in her bearing something more than either bravado or self-control—a gallant and generous spirit.

And from that moment he set himself to fight for her as he had never fought for personal victory.

It had been in vain. She had never had a chance. If she had been older— But she was young and the disease feasted on her youth.

A few weeks—eight at the outside.

She recalled him gently.

"You do love me, don't you, Stephen?"

"Yes," he answered, with his bleak honesty.

"It's quite all right for you to say so now. Medical and domestic etiquette have to give way. I wanted just to hear you say it."

"I love you."

She closed her eyes.

"These have been the most wonderful two years of my life."

He didn't understand. But he knew that she was going to tell him at last about that secret strength of hers. He bent closer, so that he would not lose one of those faintly falling words.

"You see—people have always loved me, and it's been very lovely to be loved—but often, often I used to think to myself that it was because I was beautiful and happy—and made people happy. Nobody knew about me—the real me—or cared. I often thought about this happening—and wondered—just how much would be left. I never dreamed that just when I was really bankrupt, with nothing to give but trouble—a great love might be given me. After all, the glory of life doesn't lie in its length, does it? I might have lived to be an old, old woman and never known how wonderful it might be."

He was deeply moved and oddly unashamed of being moved. Yet the hard logic in him wanted to reason the thing out to the end. He couldn't rest, not knowing the whole truth.

"But Digby," he said; "Digby—don't you love him?"

"Of course. No one could help it. He's so generous and anxious and faithful. So pathetic. Every day he lays his flowers at the altar of a memory."

"A memory?"

"Of the woman he loved so passionately. But I'm not that woman any more. I remember her. She was charming. They made the most lovely couple. But she's dead."

"I don't know about all that. He's breaking his heart."

Her lips quivered.

"It won't break—not quite."

"Well—whatever people mean by breaking their hearts."

She moved a little so that her face was towards the curtained windows. Her eyes were wide open, and he felt that she was seeing something that was hidden from him.

"Digby's so healthy and strong and eager. He shrinks from the very thought of death."

"That's true. He won't believe that you're not getting better. He won't believe even now."

He caught the enigmatic shadow of her smile.

"Poor Digby. He's puzzled and frightened. He wants the old me to come back dreadfully. But if I don't——"

"Well?"

"He just can't help turning towards hope."

"My dear——"

"Oh, I'm glad—frightfully glad. Stephen—the new me—"

the dying me, couldn't have borne the burden of such a responsibility. I'm free."

Their silence was like a deep, strong tide, sweeping away the last barrier between them. In it they seemed to speak to each other for the first time. Neither knew how long it lasted.

The sound of a car turning into the gates roused them to look at each other.

"Perhaps—two months?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Our whole lives—our very own."

He held her hand hard between both his. Something was rending him, tearing down the restraints of years. It hurt—and yet it was beautiful, too—a kind of difficult, splendid surrender. He lifted her hand and kissed it.

## II

Digby felt as though someone had hit him over the heart—stunned and sick. The red, heavy-headed roses which he had brought for her lay on that table, where he had put them in order to give a hand to that doctor fellow. They seemed to make fun of him. He could hear the echo of his own fatuously cheerful: "Well, Rosslyn, how goes it? A bit better to-day, don't you think?" And the long glass opposite held the ghost of his laughing face. He stared at himself uncomprehendingly. For all his pallor and the expression of bewildered consternation, he made a fine figure of a man—fair skinned and upright, with clear eyes and square shoulders and lean flanks. He looked so strong—the very embodiment of security. He couldn't connect himself with the thought of death—dissolution—simply couldn't. And yet in two months—at the outside—Claire—his wife—the romance of his life—would be gone—beyond his reach. The place would be empty of her for ever.

His first impulse had been to rush upstairs to her, take her in his arms as he used to do after they had been cruelly separated for a few days, and hold her fast. But then he remembered. She had to be spared all excitement, all strain. He couldn't even cry his heart out on her shoulder. He had to be calm—as brave as she was. For ten minutes he had

stood there staring at himself, trying to fix on some attitude that he could take up and carry through to the end. But everything seemed unreal and intolerable. What could one say to someone who had just been sentenced to death—someone whom one loved? How could one go on living with them—eating, sleeping, talking, with the future closing down like a shutter, and the pitifully sweet past jogging one's memory? Two months? The two years had been cruel enough. But then he had been able to pretend to himself. He had been cheerful, and had made plans of what they would do when she was well again. Pretence, of course, eating at one's heart, but still making life endurable.

Now there was nothing for it but surrender, a grim, awful waiting face to face with the truth.

Two months. If it were only now—both of them together.

He began to move about the room. The pain seemed to have become physical. It wouldn't let him rest. Nor could he go up to her—not yet. She would understand. Finally he threw open the long french-window and went down into the garden.

It was the loveliest garden of a luxurious and expensive suburb. It had been his gift to her—an integral part of his campaign. In a few weeks, by dint of a white-hot energy and prodigality, he had transformed its previous common-placeness into a paradise of rare flowers, which in the red evening sunlight shone like the jewels of a great necklace. Even now it was difficult to believe that he should have failed.

At the bottom was a private gate that led out into the roadway. It opened and he saw a woman come up the path. He recognized her with a sensation of almost passionate relief. He was like a rudderless ship, manned by a panic-stricken crew, who had come suddenly in sight of land. Lucy Garfield! Claire's friend and his—someone who loved them both, whose handclasp was a thing of understanding and infinite comfort. He went to meet her, hurrying, as though he could not bear another moment of his forlornness.

He had an idea that she knew already. She was hatless, and walking quickly, too, with that bearing of quiet, vigorous purpose which he liked so well. The sunlight shone on the thick ash-blond hair. The early silver scarcely showed. Not young any more—older than Claire. There was a faint



hint of matronly breadth about the fine, gracious figure. Yet her glowing health, her sunny and gallant temper with its undertone of womanly tenderness and pity, made her one of those people whose age is of no significance. They are young for ever.

She took his hand. Her own was both warm and cool, gentle and strong. Her eyes met his with a steady gravity.

"I saw the two cars," she said. "I guessed that Doctor Rosslyn had called in another opinion. I tried to wait, but I couldn't. I was too anxious."

"It's all over," he said simply. "It's a question of weeks now."

They turned and walked slowly side by side towards the house. It had been their custom to meet like this on the fine summer evenings, and to pick out the finest blooms for Claire before they went up to her together. The few minutes of her companionship had been something to look forward to. They strengthened him for the tragic ordeal of that sick-room where he sat hour after hour, facing death and pretending he didn't see. If only Claire had gone on being Claire— But she had changed. Physically he wouldn't have recognized her. But it was more than that. She had drifted away—almost out of hearing. More and more, for all his tormenting love and pity, he had felt like a stranger. He was embarrassed when Lucy left them.

"I believe I've known all along," he said.

"You've been very brave, Digby."

"No; rather a coward. I didn't dare admit it myself. It seemed incredible. She had been so lovely and full of life. You know—I used to think we were the happiest people in the world."

"I know you made her very happy."

"It's good of you to say so, Lucy. It comforts me. You've been a wonderful friend. You've known and loved Claire all your life, and you might so easily have been—well—jealous or disapproving; felt that I wasn't good enough for her. But you've been my friend too."

"I wanted to be when I saw what you were to her—a perfect lover always."

He flushed deeply.

"I don't know; I've wondered lately. I seem somehow

to have lost touch ; I've been stupid with wretchedness ; I felt as though I were failing her."

"It's not that. My poor Claire ! It's been a slow, slow dying ; and dying people are all by themselves. We stretch out hands, but can't reach them any more. It's not your fault. Claire understands better than anyone."

He was silent. He didn't trust his voice. She comforted him immeasurably. And yet he knew that she herself was in bitter need of comfort. He glanced swiftly at her profile and saw how pale she was—deathly pale. She loved Claire. There had always been something between these two—a rare and exquisite understanding, such as is possible only between women—which had sometimes left him outside. Somehow he hadn't minded. He loved beautiful things and he saw that it was beautiful, their closeness to each other.

Even now, when Claire was drifting away faster and faster, Lucy had somehow managed to keep close. She would follow to the very edge of the grave. At the thought a new inexplicable pang shot through him.

"Lucy, they've been rather wonderful—these two years, haven't they ? I mean—life isn't just happiness, is it ? I didn't know anyone like Claire could be so brave and patient ; or that anyone could have such a friend as you have been to us."

"Oh, Digby dear, what have I done that anyone wouldn't have done ?"

"You've been yourself. That's all. Of course you don't see how splendid that is. Lucy, I'm a clumsy, stupid fellow. I don't know what I should have done without you. You won't desert me ?"

"Desert you ?"

"You'll stand by ?"

"You know I will."

He heard the puzzled reproach in her low, husky voice.

"I mean—as my friend—not just because I'm Claire's husband—because—you're the only person I shall have left."

"Of course—I am your friend."

"Always ?"

"Always."

The path was steep, and they stood still a moment, a little breathless, looking down at a cluster of red roses. Another day they would have picked them for her, but now

the thought of flowers tasted of death. He knew that there were tears on his companion's cheeks. But he couldn't care. It was as though somewhere—inside himself—on the horizon of some inner vision, a tiny spark had kindled and was brightening and glowing, and was spreading fast until it filled the whole of him with an indescribable warmth. He had to close his eyes lest he should see what he must not see—not yet.

A maidservant stood at the open window.

"If you please, sir, the mistress asks if you and Miss Garfield would come up."

They had both started, as though for a moment they had forgotten. They turned quickly, guiltily. Twilight covered the garden with a vague enchantment. Lucy Garfield stumbled. He gave her his arm. He knew that she had seen too. Her hand trembled with foreknowledge. A moment later she drew away from him and went on alone.

### III

Claire had heard Stephen Rosslyn's car turn out of the drive. But she did not expect Digby to come to her. Not at first. He would be too terribly shaken. He would go out into the garden, and since it was Lucy's visiting time he would meet her, as he often did, and they would comfort each other. She smiled faintly to herself.

Her thoughts were very tender of them both, but they seemed a long way off. She felt towards them as an explorer might feel towards people he was leaving behind him. All that was real to her was the journey and the man who would know how to bring her safely out of harbour. Still, she wanted to do the best she could.

So she had sent for them. She wanted them together. She had an odd physical and emotional shrinking from the idea of being alone with either of them. She felt that they would try to get too near to her, lay hold of her and drag her back into being one of them. And she wasn't one of them any more. She was a person apart, with a new and different life of her own. She was dying.

She wondered if she were heartless. She tried to recapture herself and Digby. She remembered that she had been beauti-

ful and very gay and happy, and Digby a most perfect lover. It wasn't only his prodigal generosity. He had always done things enchantingly and splendidly mad. One night he had waited five hours in a bitter snowstorm just to see her come home from a dance, and even then he hadn't spoken to her, but had lifted his hat with a grave and gallant salute, as though she had been a princess. And after they were married he had been the same. He seemed to know instinctively what other men found out too late, that love, however steadfast, is a curious and exquisite thing, able to withstand tempest and disaster, but not frost. He had been her husband, her friend and her wooer. And because of the very stuff of youth and life that was in them, they had wonderful times. She remembered how they had laughed—like children.

And then death, which, had it come suddenly, would have simply broken the survivor's heart, had gently laid its hand on her and drawn her away from him. Neither of them had known quite what was happening. It had been so gradual. It was as though very slowly they had begun to speak a different language. His distress had been pitiful, but he could do nothing. His health and instinctive joy of life had been like a baffling wall between them.

In his place had come a man to whom death was the commonplace of life—a grim ungracious comrade who, for all his indifference to suffering, knew what suffering meant. He cared nothing for the laughter and beauty which she had lost. He rarely laughed, and she knew by the way he thrust aside her flowers that their beauty was hidden from him. But he had come to love her. Through the ugliness and humiliation of illness his love reached her, and held her fast in its protection. It was like a miracle. It made death a revelation of life.

The door opened. She shivered a little. They were so big and strong. It was like a blast of crude rough wind. She knew that they were ashamed. And after that first moment's recoil she was sorry for their tragic embarrassment. She held out her hand and Digby caught it and kissed it. The familiar, cheery: "Well, darling how goes it?" had risen visibly to his lips and had died there. Suddenly like a boy overwhelmed with grief he dropped on his knees beside her, burying his face against her arm.

She looked at Lucy. They were two women understanding

each other. They even smiled, though the tears had gathered in Lucy's eyes. Claire knew how Lucy loved her. She held out her free hand over the bowed head between them. And so they remained a moment.

"You mustn't," Claire whispered. "You mustn't be so dreadfully unhappy—either of you. My dears, it comes to everyone; it will to you, you know. And I've had such a wonderful life. No one could have had more love." She felt Digby's fierce confirmative pressure, but she was not thinking of him. "I'd be content and happy—if only you were too."

He stood up almost roughly.

"Don't, Claire. You mustn't say things like that—impossible things. It's—a sort of outrage. What will my life be if you leave me?"

She thought wearily to herself, suppose she told him the truth; suppose she said: "My dear, my death will be the crisis of a long misery for you. You will suffer frightfully, but then you'll begin to get better. In a few months you will be your old self, the self you haven't been for two years—since we began to lose each other. Besides, I love Steve Rosslyn."

But of course she couldn't. Only the dying can face the truth.

"I want you to be very quiet and listen," she said faintly. "You know, the end might come any time, and there's something I want to say—to both of you. At first—I meant to say it only to Lucy. But we three love one another. We can surely trust one another."

He bent over her.

"Claire—my darling—what is it?"

She felt how difficult it was going to be. He was so simple and sincere, so desperately unhappy. He wouldn't even know that he was lying. She drew Lucy close to her as though for support. She felt that Lucy guessed and was gathering all her strength together. They two would have to manage him between them.

"In a way, of course, I don't need to ask. It will happen, sooner or later. But I wanted to make it easy. You are both such darlings—so loyal—I wanted you to know it would make me happy."

"Claire," he began passionately, "if there was anything—my dearest, you know I'd give my life."

"Yes, dear, I do know. It's not that; not a sacrifice. Digby, you and Lucy are young still; young enough to be very happy. I want you—when the time comes—to marry each other."

He stood with his shoulders thrust back. He looked very handsome and very stern.

"Claire, you don't know what you're saying."

"Yes, I do. I've thought it all out. I haven't much strength. You mustn't make me say things over and over again. Digby, dear, you will marry. You couldn't live alone. You might marry someone to whom I should just be a hateful thought. My memory would have to be locked away in your heart, and perhaps it would die for lack of freedom. I—I should hate that. You and Lucy love me. I should be safe with you."

He began passionately: "Has either of us given you any reason——?"

She stopped him with a faint gesture. She was very tired. Their strength, their overflowing vigour, seemed to fill the room with tumult. She wanted to close her eyes and be alone with her dreams—with Stephen Rosslyn, the lover of her soul.

"You have been falling in love with each other for two years. You love each other. Isn't that true?"

"No," he said.

"Lucy, isn't it true?"

The two women looked at each other. Lucy Garfield was very pale, but she held herself proudly.

"Yes," she said, "it is true."

"Thank you. I was sure you would be brave. Bless you. It's all I wished; I'm quite happy."

Quite free. She closed her eyes. Digby would make a scene. He would protest and argue, defend himself. He wouldn't understand. She would just pretend.

"Lucy!"

He had turned to her with a cry of utter reproach. How could she—how dared she! It wasn't true. Worse than that—she was betraying a secret—his secret—their secret. It was a terrible thing. Breaking a dying woman's heart. His wife—the only woman he had ever loved.

"Lucy!" he whispered.

His heart seemed to die within him, and then suddenly

to burst into a new, terrible and wonderful life—like a lamp overturned by a great wind, that after a moment's darkness blazes up and sets everything on fire. He saw what was in Lucy's eyes. It was superb. He could have denied it only at the cost of his honour. Between these two he had grown insignificant. He had only one chance to be as big as they were.

"I—" he began.

She laid her finger to her lips, silencing him. He turned. He saw that Claire had fallen asleep.

"When she is awake I will tell her the truth, too, Lucy. I have loved you."

"She knows already," Lucy said.

#### IV

To the neighbours it was at first a mere headline, less thrilling than a murder or a divorce case, and having no personal interest for them.

Then someone said, "Why, there's Mrs. Calvert!"—and the thing blazed up and spread like a prairie fire. They saw that their expensive and placid suburb had become the centre of a modern drama. They were the onlookers at a race between life and death as titanic as any struggle from classic legend. And though they backed life to the last man, they were secretly pleased that the race was so close, so desperately close. They were very rich and very bored.

Had the discovery, made in far-off Canada, been made in time? Every resource of science had been called into action. Wireless messages flew across the Atlantic. A great Canadian specialist, armed with authority, was already on his way. The neighbours knew the name of his boat and the date and hour of its arrival. They followed its course passionately. The very weather became a factor in their calculations. They talked of the forces of cross currents and unfavourable headwinds. A fog in the Channel, reported with the liner's approach to Cherbourg, brought something like consternation. Then it was heard that a special train had been ordered. Doctor Rosslyn, grim and silent, had gone to meet it.

Gallant Digby Calvert! Gallant husband!

His house looked as usual—calm and impregnable with

wealth. But the passers-by, glancing up furtively at the windows, had a vision of what lay behind their sleekness—the still young, once beautiful woman, holding out hour by hour, her eyes fixed on the distance, for the rescue that might still come; the man who loved her, reassuring and steady, heart-sick with dread; the faithful friend who never faltered in her courage, the household, like an ironic commentary, running smoothly on its well-oiled wheels.

No noise, no crying out. And yet the stolid walls masked scenes of unimaginable emotion. The thought of them melted the hardest and most indifferent.

When at last the great limousine swung into the drive and the two men passed through the instantly opened door, a sigh of relief went up. The antagonists were locked. And all sorts of unexpected people said: "Please God, please God!"

Lucy Garfield waited with Digby in his library. Claire had wanted her. But she wished she hadn't come. The room's beautiful expensiveness irked her. It made her feel unreal, like an actress in a play. Digby seemed unreal, too, standing there with his set, white face. They hadn't spoken or looked at each other. It occurred to Lucy that they hadn't really spoken for weeks; not since that day when hope had broken on them like an unexpected dazzling light. They had avoided each other's eyes. All their strength—all their purpose—had been set on the one point, saving Claire, and there was no "themselves" and no future.

And yet——

She glanced shyly at him. Just for a moment her tired mind slipped its leash. What was going on behind that front of stern masculinity? Was he thinking of her? No, he wouldn't dare; no more than she dared think of him. They had put their love away—out of sight. But it was there. What was happening to it in the silence and darkness? All sorts of sharp, broken questions flashed by her like points of fire. She let down an iron shutter against them. They were too terrible.

\* It was Digby who spoke first. The loved, familiar voice sent a shock along her straining nerves, as though a stranger had suddenly used his tones.

"What a time they are! It's unendurable."

"I know. Perhaps it's a good sign."



"Yes. How—how was she?"

"Quite calm. You'd think she was the last person concerned."

"Oh, she's braver than any of us."

One of the forbidden thoughts leaped into her mind. It wasn't courage, not altogether. Claire didn't want to live. Her living was tragic. Because everything that had made life worth while had been taken from her. It was as though they had stripped her body before she were dead, and now, if she were not to die, she would never forget.

"Digby!"

He made a curt gesture. Someone was coming downstairs. In a minute they would know.

They looked at each other. It might well be that it was the last time they would be able to meet each other's eyes with truth. Their love that had seemed so blessed, like a treasure stowed away safely against the distant future, had become a wicked, torturing, fiercely desiring thing. They had been so innocent and loyal. They had become traitors.

Lucy closed her eyes so that she should not see what was in his any more. She saw instead, in one swift picture after another—Claire—Claire the pretty child, the gay schoolgirl, the happy lovable woman, the friend! The wonderful friend! Their friendship had been one of the sweetest things in life. They had been so proud of it. They had often said: "Nothing can ever come between us."

And now upstairs Claire was thinking to herself—oh, terrible things; true things!

The door opened. Rosslyn stood on the threshold. At the sight of him Lucy's heart seemed to leap in her breast—with what emotion she never knew. His woollen face was colourless, and there was a gleam of moisture about his lips. She heard his voice, far-off and without expression.

"It's all right. We were just in time."

After what seemed an interminable, insufferable pause, Digby said: "Thank God!" And at that Lucy Garfield began to laugh, and from laughter passed to the bitterest weeping.

## V

They had given Claire a hand-glass, and every now and again she took it up and looked at herself. And she saw that she was growing young and beautiful.

The windows stood wide open. It was a warm and lovely summer, and to-morrow she was to go out into the garden for the first time. And after that the wheels of life would begin to spin again—faster and faster. Presently she would go ahead—the Riviera probably; Monte Carlo. She smiled involuntarily. Oh, the gay days! How they had laughed sometimes. Digby understood laughter.

He was like a boy. The littlest things might hide a big glorious joke for him. An incurable boy.

Digby.

Her smile died. She had forgotten. That was all over. Digby and Lucy. Poor darlings. How unhappy they were. They tried so hard to pretend that nothing had happened, and they couldn't look her in the face. Their pitiable guiltiness hurt her. For, after all, it was her fault. It was she who had driven them into the open—just to save her own soul—to set herself free. Well, now she had to play the game—see the thing through. Besides, she wanted nothing better. It was all quite simple. She had Stephen—Stephen, the friend and comforter, who had gone down with her to the very gates of death.

She wondered if he would go with her to Monte Carlo. She would ask him. The climate suited her. And she liked the place. At least she had been very happy there.

The door opened. There was Digby. He always came at the same time, very punctually and faithfully, with his gift of flowers for which there wasn't a spare vase. Without opening her eyes she could see his white face smiling fixedly at her.

"Well, darling, how goes it?"

He laid his hand on hers and she returned the pressure firmly. She smiled back at him, and she knew her smile was as lifeless as his own. It need not have been. Life welled up in her like the waters of a secret spring. It made her impatient, almost resentful.

"Better and better. You know to-morrow I'm to be allowed into the garden."

"Splendid! We'll have a sort of reception."

"Never mind about that now. Sit down a moment. I want to talk to you. I can't bear you to be unhappy."

"Unhappy? But I'm not."

"Aren't you?" She shook her head. She hated to see

him flush with shame. He had always been so frank—so proudly honest. “Oh, my dear, aren’t we friends enough? Do you really imagine that I’ve forgotten, and that you two can put your heads in the sand and hide from me—you and Lucy? You know—nothing has really changed—except that I’m alive when I ought to be dead.”

“Claire—don’t, please—it’s too hateful—to talk like that.”

“It isn’t hateful; only truthful. We three made a contract, and I’ve broken my share of it. I’ve put you in a horrible position.”

“It’s as though you were laughing at us—at everything.”

“I’m not. Perhaps if I did——”

She broke off, sighing. It would be nice to laugh again. Only he would be so hurt. He sat there on the edge of her bed with his face hidden in his hands—pathetically young—like a schoolboy, ashamed and humiliated, driven to confession. And it wasn’t his fault at all.

“Claire—I’m not a fool. Of course I’ve realized—I’ve been trying to make up my mind—I wanted you to understand how it had happened. You know—don’t you?—that from the first day I set eyes on you I never looked at anyone else; I never wanted to. It wasn’t only that you seemed to me the loveliest woman in the world. You were my friend and my companion. Wherever I went you came too—in spirit, in thought, in action. We two—we were just two parts of one person, weren’t we?”

“Yes, dear.”

“It would have gone on like that. We weren’t just in love. We were real lovers. We’d have grown older—slowly—side by side—adjusting ourselves to the same measure. Then came your illness. It sounds horrible, I know—but just when you needed me most I lost touch. You see—it was as though in our—our going towards death you had run on ahead—away from me. You left me behind. And just because I loved you so I was desperately lonely.”

“Digby—please—I do understand.”

He almost wrung his hands.

“I know everything you must be thinking; I know how wretchedly I must have seemed to fail you. We both know. Lucy said once: ‘She doesn’t want to live because she feels she has lost everything.’ That nearly smashed me up. To

think that I—of all people in the world—should make you suffer.”

“Dear, I haven’t suffered.”

His eyes were blind with tears.

“You only say that.”

“But it’s true I haven’t.”

“For God’s sake, don’t be generous ; it just breaks my heart.”

“You see, I was in love myself.”

He frowned, as though he hadn’t heard clearly.

“What ?”

“I am in love too.”

“I don’t understand. You mean—with me ?”

“With Stephen.”

“Stephen ? In God’s name—Stephen what ?”

“Didn’t you know that Doctor Rosslyn’s name was Stephen ?”

He stared at her with wide incredulous eyes. Then to her complete astonishment he almost shouted : “The black-guard !” and strode over to the window, standing there with clenched fists, his face averted so that she could see nothing but his profile. Still, it was a very pleasing profile. Strong and sensitive and laughter-loving. She wondered, in a detached sort of way, why he couldn’t laugh now. She could have laughed. But that was because of the life that was beginning to run through her like a happy song. It was getting terribly easy to be happy. And she mustn’t ; he would be too hurt ; it wasn’t fair.

“Can’t you understand,” she said gravely, “that I was lonely too ?”

He turned reluctantly. “Lonely ?”

“It is lonely—dying.”

“And that fellow——”

“He came too. He was my companion. He went with me where you couldn’t go. When I knew about you and Lucy I was glad. It set me free.”

His voice sounded muffled and unsteady.

“Very fortunate ; very convenient.”

“Don’t be bitter, Digby.”

But she was looking at her hands, spread out on the white coverlet, and forgot what she was going to say. Her hands had worried her terribly. There had been no escape

from them. She had had to watch them wither. Now they were like flowers in sunshine after a sharp frost. They were growing beautiful. They reminded her of her rings—the great diamond that Digby had given her, her favourite emerald and sapphire. To-morrow she would wear them again. And she had locked them away for ever. How strange and wonderful!

Then she remembered.

"It's no good being bitter. And why should we grudge each other happiness? Did you want me to be alone? Don't you realize that now you are free too? That's why I told you. I wanted you to feel that you had a right to each other."

He was staring at her as though she were a puzzling stranger.

"What is to happen now? What do you expect?"

"That we should all behave with dignity and kindliness. There's no need for resentment. Something has happened that can't be changed. We four have just got to go our ways."

"Lucy and I; you—and—and that man?"

"And Stephen Rosslyn," she agreed.

As she spoke they heard Rosslyn's car turn into the drive. Digby made a queer, strangled gesture, like a man desperately seeking expression, and his eyes lighting on the flowers he had brought her, he seized them and threw them out of the window.

"You don't want them, anyway," he stammered.

She knew that he nearly slammed the door. It was unreasonable, but also rather touching and very young of him to want everything and everybody—the whole world. She rather wanted it herself. But she overcame the impulse to call him back and put her arms round him and kiss him.

After all, one had to choose.

And they had chosen.

## VI

The two men met in the hall. Rosslyn half held out his hand and then let it drop, and the movement put him at a disadvantage, and he flushed painfully so that for a moment Digby went hot with a vicarious shame.

He had never really thought of Rosslyn as a man. He had seen him as a clever, trustworthy doctor, a confidant,

but nevertheless a person apart, outside their circle, not to be judged by ordinary standards. His manners and his appearance hadn't mattered. Now Digby saw that he was both clumsily made and undersized, and that however much he might pay for his clothes they would never fit him. No need to be told that he had begun life as a shoe-black. The arrogance of the self-made success and the defiant awkwardness of a man out of his element were written all over him.

And Claire loved him—Claire, who had loved Digby Calvert. Digby felt as though the earth were giving way under his feet.

Still, somebody had to behave with dignity. And he, the injured husband, at least as the——

His thoughts made a hurried jump. What he had to say could be said at once and briefly.

"Mrs. Calvert has told me," he began. "I don't know how the other members of your profession would regard your conduct, and I don't propose to ask them. I intend to protect my wife as long as she is my wife, and I shall set her free myself. That is all that I have to say to you."

He went on towards his library. He had behaved well, but he felt oddly miserable and physically almost broken.

At the door he couldn't help saying: "I hope to God you'll make her happy!" in a voice that gave the formula a harsh and aching truth.

This time the door actually slammed.

Stephen Rosslyn climbed the stairs heavily. He was still flushed with shame. He wondered why she hadn't warned him. It wasn't quite fair. He had looked like a fool and a blackguard. And, anyway, what was he doing in all this mess? His life, that had seemed so certain, so grimly secure, was in pieces. He had lost control. He felt as though he were being whirled downwards—Heaven knew where—on the crest of an avalanche. He couldn't think of his work. Perhaps in a few weeks he wouldn't have any work to think about. There would be a hideous scandal. He would have to begin all over again.

That was what love did to a man.

Well, he did love her. It was the one romance of his life. He had never even had a friend. He had been a lonely, morose fellow whom no one had bothered to understand. But she had understood. She had been lonely too. They

had been like castaways on a desolate shore. They had come together in their bitter need.

The memory of her poor wan face, turned to greet him as though he had been the sunlight, melted his brief resentment. It made everything worth while—every sacrifice. They would stand shoulder to shoulder against the world. He would never count the cost.

He entered her room firmly, eagerly.

His picture of her was so vivid that for a moment he stopped short, staring stupidly, as though he had blundered upon a stranger. He had forgotten. Or perhaps something had happened—had been happening a long time and he hadn't realized.

It had happened to her.

It wasn't that she hadn't always been fastidiously careful about her person. At her weakest she had clung bravely to the delicacies and decencies of civilized life. But this, he knew, was different. It was something from which he instinctively recoiled—something alien and half-frightening. She was like an exquisite, many-hued bird preening itself after the storm, or a butterfly that had broken from its chrysalis. The dying, necessitous human being had gone. She lay there because she chose—luxuriating and beautiful—rising slenderly out of a foam of white, her dark hair crowned with gold, and something shining in the delicate oval face that he had never seen before.

He went towards her because she was watching him and waiting. But he went heavily. She gave him her hand. How often he had kissed its piteousness, its veined and bony piteousness. She had stretched it out as though he had been a rescuer in a stormy sea, and he knew that his touch and his kiss had comforted her. But to-day her gesture was full of a subtle challenge which made him hold back. He stood there, stiff and stupid, looking down at her, and the smile faded from her lips.

"I have just seen—your husband," he said. "He knows."

"Yes—I told him."

"You might have warned me."

"I'm sorry. It's been a reality to me for so long that I felt as though everybody knew—in their hearts. What did he say?"

"Very little. He was generous—according to his lights."

"Digby's lights aren't bad," she interposed. "And he has always been generous—in everything."

"He said he would set you free."

She shook her head.

"We couldn't allow that, could we, Stephen? After all, he'd go on living with me. It's we who are running away. We must pay the price."

She had seemed to ask his agreement. But he knew she had stated her deliberate decision.

To a woman of her class it wouldn't matter much. She would live it down. Wealth and position would buffer her from a temporary discomfort. And she didn't think of him. But he saw himself, torn from his roots, trailed at her heels into a glittering life that was strange and horrible as a nightmare.

"Yes, of course," he said.

"We must go soon, Stephen. Before everything becomes intolerable."

His mind ran to his patients. There was Colonel Anstruther—an extraordinary case—it would have been a feather in his cap. But now——

"You're not strong enough," he objected.

"Oh, yes, I am; strong enough to get out of this quickly; but not strong enough to stay."

"My work——"

"Get someone to take your place temporarily. Afterwards— Of course we could never come back here."

Something hot welled up in him. How calmly she took it! The thing for which he had starved and sweated tossed aside like a worn-out dress.

"I have money enough for us both," she said.

"But I couldn't——" he began violently.

She pressed his hand—a convulsive pressure.

"Stephen, I'm sorry; that was crude and brutal of me. I—I was thinking of—of—ways and means—how to escape. But of course I understand. You couldn't give up your work—not for always."

"I shall have to," he said. "Even if I'm not struck off the register it isn't likely anyone will come to a man who—who—did what I am going to do."

"But you can take up research? You've always wanted to. You shall have the finest laboratory in the world."



There was something feverish and almost panic-stricken about her. It was as though she were afraid and were trying to bribe him. She was clinging to him. When she had been ill and ugly she had clung to him, and he had been proud and happy. But now he had a violent physical impulse to get away, out of reach of that white hand—that delicate, repellent perfume.

"It's awfully good of you," he brought over his stiff lips.

"Stephen— you think it's worth while? You still want me?"

"I am not the sort of man to change my mind," he said with a kindling defiance. Then, half-ashamed, he stammered hastily: "I've never loved anyone else. I—I couldn't live without you. Surely you know that."

Their eyes met. She closed hers instantly as though overcome by a sudden exhaustion. But he suspected her. She was acting. She wasn't tired at all. She hadn't wanted to meet his eyes. She had been afraid; as afraid as he was himself.

And only a few weeks ago her dying gaze had hung on him. They had sat for minutes together, silent, their souls locked, their sight piercing the outer shell to their very innermost selves.

He didn't know what to do or say. The old clumsiness which had always paralysed him the moment he had to do with people outside his profession, held him blankly silent. In a kind of panic his fingers slid to her pulse.

She answered with a faint start. The movement had been so unexpected, so utterly incongruous. It had been part of his routine when she had been dying, but as a lover there was something tragically funny about it.

She felt laughter—a scornful, ironical laughter—rise in her throat.

"Dear Stephen, I'm all right. Don't."

She had to look at him. He had taken out his watch and was staring at it with an absurd fixity. She saw his red, bony wrist, which always gave one the unjustifiable impression that he had forgotten his cuffs. His tie had come up over the top of his collar. There was something about his neck, determined, capable and commonplace, which made her think of a back parlour and fumed oak. She could almost smell the atmosphere.

And she was going to live with him all the rest of her days. She was going to ask him to go to Monte Carlo.

Suddenly the laughter was too much for her. It broke from her like a cascade—so gay, so sweet sounding that she lay back, breathless, and listening as though to the echo of music. Why, she hadn't laughed like that for two years. A spell had broken. The room threw off its pall of dim melancholy. The world lay outside waiting for her.

Stephen Rosslyn had let her wrist drop. He stood up. He felt that someone had slapped him across the face—slapped him awake. He found himself in a room full of flowers and sunlight and rich and expensive useless things—with a strange woman. The strange woman was frighteningly beautiful.

And she was laughing at him.

## VII

It was a celebration. The garden made a fitting background. Digby couldn't help being proud of it. The sunshine and the blue sky, paling to twilight, made the prettily-dressed women look like living flowers, and the men their sombre, careful gardeners. Claire sat in the midst of them. She was radiant. Wherever he went Digby seemed to see her. Her voice, low and gentle, transcended the confused murmur by sheer sweetness. In the old days it had been such fun—stealing wicked glances at each other: "Oh, my darling, how lovely when all these stupid people have gone!" But now she never looked at him.

"It's nothing short of a resurrection," someone commented congratulatingly.

But it was Lucy who told the truth.

"She has grown more beautiful than ever," she said.

They stood together on the edge of the group that surrounded Claire like a court. Digby didn't want to be there. It wasn't dignified. He had tried to keep away. But he was drawn back each time as though by a fine, strong thread. He made himself talk to Lucy.

"I shall be thankful when it's all over," he said. "It's a wretched farce. It makes me feel utterly unreal."

"Sometimes I have to pinch myself to make sure I am

really awake," Lucy said. "After all, Claire and I have been such friends."

Her point of view seemed to him very trivial. What did a mere friendship matter? A friendship between women. Negligible. That weak-kneed hound, Rosslyn!

"Of course I can't interfere," he said. "Everybody makes their own fate. But what she sees in him, God alone knows."

"What do you see in me, my dear?" Lucy asked.

He said "Ah!" gallantly, and looked at her with a smile which in spite of himself grew a little stiff. It was probably the faërie quality of the summer twilight and Claire's fragile loveliness that made Lucy seem unexpectedly set and elderly. He hadn't noticed, before, her undoubted tendency towards—stoutness. He had thought of her as a sort of Ceres. He hoped she wouldn't overdo things. But she would make an excellent travelling companion—capable and reasonable. Much better than Claire, who always insisted on at least four hat-boxes. He remembered that time on the Italian frontier on their way to Monte Carlo, and laughed out loud. He couldn't have helped himself. It had been so frightfully funny. They had sat in their sleeper afterwards absolutely doubled up with the jolly pain of it.

Claire had heard him laugh. She turned her head involuntarily, and their eyes met. He was horribly ashamed. She must have thought that he was enjoying himself with Lucy.

"I was remembering that custom-house fellow we met," he stammered. "I don't know why. He just came into my mind."

He spoke with unnecessary loudness, and everyone turned to listen. They expected him to tell the story. A faint rose had crept into Claire's cheeks. He could have killed himself. It was a ghastly, inexcusable thing to have said under the circumstances. And he wasn't really crude and tactless. Only he hadn't wanted her to think——

"Digby is a big schoolboy," Claire murmured excusingly. "A joke will go on amusing him for years."

She turned the conversation. He knew that she had meant to snub him, but he was resentfully sure that she wasn't as casual as she seemed. She would have been more—or less—than human if she hadn't remembered it too—that sweet Italian morning.

And there was that Rosslyn fellow. Of course he had to be there. In a way, he was the hero of the afternoon. Oh, very much the hero. He had saved her life. Good Lord, he looked as though he had slept in that coat! He didn't seem to know what to do with his hands or his mouth. And Claire loved him! There were things beyond mortal understanding.

"Look here, Lucy. We can't go on like this. It isn't endurable. I'm ready if you are. The sooner we cut the painter and get off, the better. To-morrow, if you can manage it."

"To-morrow," she brooded.

He felt a rush of impatience. She might make a good traveller, but she would be a precious slow one. Everything would have to be done with order and reason. Not like Claire, who was ready at a moment's notice to dash off to the most absurd places—hat-boxes and all. That time they had set off for Cairo, for instance; and landed in Honolulu.

He heard Lucy's voice—warm, maternal, a trifle flat-sounding perhaps. Oh, he loved her deeply, deeply. A true friend. No man could ask more. Still, a true friend ought not to run off with a friend's husband.

"Are you sure, Digby, that you want to go?"

"Do you think I am the sort of man to change my mind?" he asked sternly.

"I'll let you know," she considered. "I'll write you. You'll get my letter to-morrow morning. Don't plan anything till then."

"Oh, well," he muttered. "Why should we make such a fuss? We can buy things on our way."

Her kindly mouth tightened a little. He was a dear, dear fellow. Just the husband for happy, light-hearted Claire. But a trifle obtuse—insensitive. He couldn't see what she was giving up. Not her reputation, her place in the world; that didn't matter. But Claire—Claire's love. People never believed how dear women could be to one another. Claire had been something wonderful in her life—an exquisite, serene and sunny refuge of understanding, that would have been stronger than death or separation. Even if they had never seen each other again it wouldn't have mattered. But now this had happened—this stupid, awful, silly catastrophe—and everything would be spoiled. Digby would stand

between them like a sword cutting off their very thoughts from each other.

She stole a quick glance at her companion. She had a sudden quite primitive impulse to hit him. He looked so handsome and assured, as though he were convinced that any sacrifice would be worth while.

She wanted to tell him : "My dear, as far as I'm concerned you're not worth one of her shoe-laces," and then go up to Claire and put her arms over her shoulder and say : "Let's begin all over again. It's been too silly. Let's forget the tiresome fellow."

She caught Claire's eyes. She thought that there was something half wistful, half pleading in their momentary steadiness. Perhaps she was thinking, too : "How silly !"

"I think I'll go now," Lucy said.

"I'll walk with you to the gate," Digby returned courteously.

They strode over the thick, deep lawn in bleak silence. They shook hands.

"To-morrow, I suppose, I shall have to kiss him," Lucy thought.

They had never kissed each other.

"I wonder if she always wears such unbecoming hats," Digby reflected. Aloud he said in a harsh undertone : "Don't keep me waiting, Lucy."

"I shall write to-night."

"I can't stick it much longer. And it isn't fair to Claire."

She walked on a few steps, and then stopped, leaning reflectively on her parasol.

"She doesn't love him," she said.

"Doesn't—what ?"

"Not now. It just happens that there are some people who are nice to die with. You don't necessarily want to live with them."

"Lucy——"

She nodded over her shoulder.

"You're a dear child, Digby, but very stupid. I'll write."

He stared after her till she turned the corner of the lane. He didn't know what she meant. His brain reeled. But he felt that under given circumstances he might conceivably stop hating her.

Claire had watched the two go off side by side through

the dusk. She knew that Digby was frightfully unhappy by the droop of his shoulders, which had never drooped. She wondered why that custom-house official had come into his mind from nowhere, as it seemed. Unless, of course, he had been planning things with Lucy. Nothing was more likely. And yet— He could hardly have forgotten something else; something that had happened afterwards, when the laughter had passed over them like a happy wind—how they had sat, hand in hand, watching the dawn break, thanking God secretly in a light-hearted, awe-struck gratitude—for being so happy with each other.

He wouldn't laugh much with Lucy. Lucy was serious-minded at bottom. Her sense of humour was quiet and elderly. She had been born elderly. Claire felt that Digby and she had been born hopelessly and incurably young. That was why Lucy had been so precious to them both.

His wonderful, jolly laughter—the gay, wonderful days! Supposing she had never been ill— It would have been then as he said—they would have grown old side by side, kept step. They would have learned whatever life had to teach them of pain and death together.

Well, what had happened had happened. You couldn't go back. You had to go on.

She made Stephen Rosslyn stand quite close to her; she seemed to be talking lightly to him.

"You see, I am strong enough. Meet me at the station to-morrow. The seven o'clock express. We can't wait. It isn't decent."

He nodded, but did not answer. His face was without colour or expression. He felt like a wild beast that had been caught and made into an exhibition for a crowd of fools. He hated them all. He wanted to kill them. But also he was afraid. He wanted frantically to escape. And he knew that there was no escape possible.

Digby drifted back into the group, and Claire stood up. She gave her hand to those nearest her. Her voice was a little breathless.

"You mustn't mind my going. It's been wonderful. A real coming back to life. But now I'm tired."

"When you have been away—" someone began.

"Ah, that will be a second honeymoon," another voice broke in teasingly. "You will have begun all over again."

Through the dusk their eyes met. And suddenly Claire heard herself laugh—just as she had done before—only not bitterly, nor ironically, but with an irrepressible sense of all the joy of life.

“That will be worth dying for,” she said.

## VIII

Digby waited at the gate long after the last guest had gone. Then he walked slowly back. It was dark now, with the velvet, unreal darkness of a summer's night. The chairs and tables had been left just as they were, and he picked out Claire's place and stood still, staring at it as though he expected to see her ghost. He came closer. He found himself touching the wicker arm, timidly at first and then in an agony of tenderness. He said her name aloud. He didn't care. The world might know. He loved her. He loved her as he had never loved her. And it was too late. They were being torn from each other.

Her lighted window sent a square of shining green on to the black grass. Its brightness hurt him like a knife in the heart. It made him feel utterly outcast. How often before their marriage he had paced, a gallant, reckless lover, beneath her window and looked up, thinking: “One day!” And now she was going. Another man—that drear, mannerless little upstart, Rosslyn—would take his place, would wait, as he had once waited in a tropic garden, for her signal; would hear her beloved voice, her beloved laughter.

He walked up and down, up and down. Why, she had laughed to-night—suddenly, at her own thoughts. She had looked at him. It had been too dark to read her eyes. And yet——

The air was thick with the scent of flowers. He felt crazed with its sweetness. His heart pounded in his breast with pain, with a gathering fury. He would kill Rosslyn—Lucy—himself—everyone; there should be an awful holocaust.

There was no escape. None. As a man of honour, he had to go. Even now Lucy might be writing.

Lucy! He stopped short. What had she meant? Why had she told him? There had been something peculiar in Lucy's manner. Was it possible? It couldn't be! Lucy was desperately in love. At least—she had said so. Once. Not desperately perhaps. It couldn't be that she too——

He put his hands to his head.

The light had gone out. He stared up, breathless, expectant. He could almost feel her behind the darkness. His hands dropped, clenched, to his side.

Lucy had said: "She doesn't love him." Lucy was wise. Lucy was their friend. If it was true, then Claire, too, was going because she, too, was a person of honour. Even Rosslyn himself, ill-bred beggar that he was, might be a victim.

And if Claire didn't love Rosslyn, then whom did she love? She loved someone. Love had been in that laugh—in that low-spoken sentence.

"Worth dying for."

Why had it been so dark that he had not read her eyes? Then he would have known. And to-morrow it would be too late.

He made up his mind. He would see her—now. He would tell her the truth. He did not love Lucy. He was not going with her. He couldn't. There was no code existent that forced a man to be unfaithful to his wife. He would go away—alone—for ever—to the ends of the earth.

He turned to the door. Then a thought seized him—daring, reckless, neck or nothing. Her window overlooked a porch. He was young enough still—more than enough in love—and a lover by instinct.

The moon came up over the trees and watched him. There was no sound in the whole world, listening and agape, but the tearing of the ivy under his groping hands. At any moment he might be made ridiculous for ever—a man burgling his own house with the front door wide open, laying infatuated siege to his own wife! He didn't care. No lover had ever cared.

He reached her window. He sat on her sill, balancing himself, hushing his broken breath. He could just see her, fairer as a wraith. The moon threw his own shadow, black and strong, on the silver floor.

"Claire."

He knew suddenly that he would not go alone.

She had been waiting for him.

A little laugh gathered in his throat. He leaned towards her, whispering, like a conspirator.

"There's a train—to-morrow—early—for Timbuktu. They'll never catch us. Sweetheart, won't you run away with me?"





MARGUERITE STEEN

*The Last Round*

Marguerite Steen tried being a schoolmistress and a teacher of dancing, and left this profession for the stage, spending three years with Fred Terry and Julia Neilson. She started her career as a novelist in 1926, since when she has written a dozen novels and plays.



## THE LAST ROUND

"DI, you oyster ! Why won't you admit that you're excited ?"

Diana removed the cigarette from her lips to answer with a smile :

"Because I think I've outworn my capacity for excitement in the last ten years, Tam !"

"Outworn your capacity for excitement at the age of thirty !" Tam's eyes goggled across her coffee cup. "Diana, don't be such a *fish* ! You aren't really, you know. I'd like to know where the business would be without your enthusiasm."

"Well, that's it, in a way. My enthusiasm, as you call it, has poured itself into different channels—impersonal ones——"

"Rubbish ! How can you be impersonal, when the man you're engaged to is coming home, at the end of ten years, to marry you ! Upon my word, you make me sorry for Clive Solway !"

"I think you're right," said Diana enigmatically. She rested her chin on her clenched hand. "I think I'm sorry for Clive myself. Ten years——" She broke off ; the silk of the Chinese robe in which she had shrouded her long slimness rustled as she shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, I suppose you needn't marry him if you don't want to," said Tam, a trifle huffily.

Diana rose abruptly and went to stand by the window. Against the curtain of pale green taffeta her Chinese robe blazed its elfin Urim of embroideries. Diana's slippers were scarlet, with long, spindly heels. She stood there, looking brittle and exquisite and absolutely still.

Curiosity goading her, Tam moved where she could see Diana's face. As though aware, it turned, pale and blank, towards her ; beyond it, infinitely faint and far, Diana herself shimmered in baffling withdrawal. Tam was tantalizingly conscious of something that hovered just beyond her reach. She felt like a child playing Hunt the Thimble, who is guided in his search by the words "Hot, hot !" or "Cold." Something told Tam that, just now, she was very hot indeed.

It came—the flash of enlightenment. Hardly able to credit her own voice, she heard herself say :

“Diana—are you *married* to him?”

“Yes.”

“You never told me,” said Tam, weakly.

“We agreed not to tell anyone.”

“But why?”

“We wanted,” said Diana, as one who repeats a lesson learned by heart, “to be absolutely sure of one another ; to know, although he was in Canada, and I here, that we belonged.”

“And now?”

Diana made a wide gesture, a gesture which included the room and its contents—many of them valuable and rare—some contributed by friends, but by far the greater number bought and paid for by Diana, representative of her energy, her business ability.

“Don’t you see? We thought we couldn’t live without each other. I’ve built myself a life of my own—a life in which Clive has no part.”

To another girl, Tam reflected, one might have said that all that was unimportant, that it would fade out when the real life—the life of being married—began. But to Diana, who took her work so seriously, one could not mouth these facile inanities.

“Clive also,” went on Diana, ruthlessly, “will have been making his own life. It doesn’t seem possible the two will dovetail.”

“Have you never thought of that before?” asked Tam absently, passing her cup for more coffee.

“Many a time—in the last five years. When we married, it seemed natural that when Clive was ready, I’d give up everything and go out to him. There wasn’t so very much to give up,” admitted Diana. “Clive was my life, in those days, my secret, inner life that had nothing to do with bread-and-butter or earning a salary. All that was incidental to the one great fact of Clive, waiting for me, working for me, getting a home ready for me.”

“And now—don’t you care so much?” asked Tam sharply.

“Not that I love Clive less, but that I care more for other things. One can’t do what I’ve done, Tam, and scrap it in five minutes, like junk!”

"Go on," said Tam suddenly. "Talk. There's something going bad in you, Diana, for want of talking."

Everyone had disapproved, Diana told her. That, of course, lent zest to the proceedings. At nineteen, elderly prudence is interpreted as a vulgar worldliness. Diana and Clive had tumbled into love as unconsciously as a pair of puppies, but, having tumbled, they took it very seriously indeed.

She was an orphan, with a hundred pounds of her own, in charge of an aunt who never ceased to urge a wealthy marriage. Clive was a younger son, three years older than Diana; his capital lay mainly in the lithe body that made complicated athletic feats a bagatelle, in a pair of extraordinarily light grey eyes, that looked as though someone had lighted candles behind them, and in an incurable optimism that persisted in seeing, beyond the far cry of Canada, a land of promise for Diana and himself. Only once did that optimism break down, when he whispered:

"I simply can't *bear* it—leaving you behind."

She knew that he whispered because he could not trust his voice; it lent an added strength to the clutch of her arms about his neck; it was responsible for the sweet folly of her reply:

"Darling—wouldn't it make it easier for us both—if we were married first?"

They went into it again—like puppies; they plunged into matrimony like puppies into water—a little frightened, but more excited. It seemed the best joke in the world, having a secret that no one else shared. Five years—Clive had given himself five years—would soon be over; meanwhile, Diana would go back to her aunt, and wait.

It was quite a good plan—if it had turned out like that. Unfortunately, less than a month after he sailed, the aunt died, suddenly, and Diana, faced with the prospect of pitching her tent with more incompatible relations, fled to town, resolved to find work. And found Tam. At the moment, to be precise, when her capital of a hundred pounds had dwindled to one and ninepence halfpenny. There is destiny in some meetings.

Long after Tam had gone home, Diana lay awake, rolling her head from side to side on the pillow, re-living those early

days; the first little job she was given, through Tam's influence, in a publishing office, someone's discovery that she was useful as a reader; the endless reading of typescript, good, bad and indifferent; a bit of diplomacy which resulted in a best-seller for the firm for which she worked; the gradual building up of a circle of friends; a salary that mounted, out of which she managed to save enough to make some tiny investments, through Tam—again—to meet Louis Crauford, who gave her advice about some shares.

The success of the first gamble, the success of the second. On reading her pass-book, Diana realized the solidifying power of money; felt her own personality expand, felt her own metamorphosis from weakness and dependence to a centre round which the other, weaker forces revolved.

So the five years passed, and Clive's summons synchronized with the opportunity put in her way—by Tam—to purchase a partnership in a young publishing firm whose work showed daring promise. Diana gasped, reading Clive's letters; the five years had passed in a flash.

"I can't offer you a palace yet, darling," he wrote. "But it's quite a decent little ranch, now I've got it going, and it only wants you to make it paradise."

She wrote back carefully, lovingly; her hand trembled as it guided the pen. One half of her leapt to his summons, the other half—the new Diana, born of the pass-book and the publishing trade—tried to put her case coolly for his consideration.

"Darling, you know I want to come now—*now*; but, listen. If we have patience a little longer, I'll come to you a rich woman! Yes, really, Clive. We'll put money into the ranch, and run it on a scale that will allow us to spend half the year in England. Darling, wouldn't it be foolish to break off now, with this in sight?"

She wept when she sealed the envelope; Clive's gay eyes, the rough, brown tangle of his hair seemed so far away. For an instant she held the envelope and its enclosure in her hands to tear them up; then the impulse passed, and frightened of its recurring, she ran down the street herself to the letter-box, and heard the envelope thud inside.

His reply, when it came, was better than she had expected. He took the matter, on the whole, coolly.

"We've both learnt something in the last five years; what is it? Prudence? A damned hard lesson, and painful in the learning. Little darling, I'll make it up to you one day. Meanwhile, it looks as if we are in for one of our old-time rivalries—this time who gets rich first! I didn't tell you in my last letter, but this place is still pretty raw; you'd find it horribly so, sweetness—but I did so want you near me. Well, I'll stick it out, and make it a palace fit for my queen."

Diana bought the partnership; the first occasion of seeing the firm under its new style—Hawkrigg and Blundell—gave her the most intimate thrill she had ever experienced. She was launched, her position was secured.

Hawkrigg and Blundell became the axis of her existence.

Clive's letters continued to come faithfully; the slow history of his successes wrote itself in terms of patience, of valiance under pitiful set-backs. She was ashamed, sometimes, to think how her own successes had come to her—meteor-like, out of a clear sky. She knew that he was waiting for her to suggest joining him, that his pride and humility could not proffer another appeal, especially in the face of her own situation. But Hawkrigg and Blundell had hooked tiny steel talons into her soul; it seemed as though she must bleed to death if she tore herself away.

And the years, which had not diminished her love for Clive, seemed in some way to have sterilized it. She was content to know that Clive was there, in the background, and thrust aside the moment when she would be forced to consider his claims.

The traces of a sleepless night, of a day more than usually full of petty annoyances, met her from the mirror the following evening when she prepared for Clive's coming. She hesitated among the gowns in her wardrobe: there was a soft thing in georgette, all tiny frills and distracting encrustations of tucks, in which, with her hair ruffled about her brow, she looked ten years younger—the Diana that Clive remembered; there was a grey thing from Paris, sleek, steely as a sword-blade—her newest and smartest gown. In it she looked formidable, with the satin flame of her hair gathered into a deadly little knot on the nape of her neck and the scarlet of her lips blazing from her dead-white face. This was the Diana that Clive did not know; the stranger Diana,



who had built her house of life and had forgotten to reserve a corner for Clive.

"It's better," she thought, "that he should see at once."

But her heart was in her mouth as she waited for his ring. When it came, she opened the door herself; almost before it closed he had her in his arms.

Crushed against his breast, some of the sterility of her love left her; the sweet, forgotten excitement of being close to him quickened the blood in her veins. She allowed her eyes to close, felt her innermost self swing out on a moving tide as his lips held hers. He was bigger, broader than she remembered him; he was her ark, which bore her in safety over the floods with which she had battled so long. The sweet luxury of allowing herself to be cared for overwhelmed her momentarily; she yielded—almost—to temptation; the voice of her soul was weak. Suddenly she struggled from his arms.

"Darling! Come in—come in!"

She saw a look of awe creeping into his eyes as he held her before him at arm's length. She guessed what it must mean to find her—like that. She laughed, nervously.

"Come, darling—I've got—everything—to show you."

"Sweetness! You've grown!"

An absurd thing to say; its absurdity brought moisture to her eyes, as she dragged him laughingly into her sitting-room. They had both forgotten the taxi, until an irate summons on the bell brought them to their senses.

"Sit there, darling—I'll see to it." His baggage was in the hall, three shabby leather cases. She laid her hand on her heart—when it leapt so she could not think.

Clive came to the door of the sitting-room; she saw him standing there, with the overhead light falling on the furrows of his face. So that was what Canada did to a man. From one temple a streak of white winged its way to the crown of his head; Clive looked forty-eight years older than his real age. The gaiety of his eyes was gone; in its place a look of infinite patience, as though a lonely angel inhabited there. She turned her head sharply aside; she could not bear to meet the gaze of that still inhabitant.

"Darling, I don't like that room—when you're not in it."

She understood him; it was the room of a stranger;

it spoke of her life in which he had no part. She felt his spirit timidly groping towards her, seeking for something that was familiar, for reassurance that the old Diana dwelt in this lovely, strange woman whom, for a moment, he had held to his heart. Her soul went out in pity towards him; twisting her lips to a smile, she took his hand in a firm clasp.

"Come, darling. We'll have to carry your bags upstairs ourselves. I've sent Jenny home for the night. You see, there's only her room, besides mine——"

He stared at her for a moment, then stooped silently and took up the two larger of the bags; she picked up the smallest one, and led the way up the narrow staircase.

The maid's room. She had made it as nice as possible, of course.

A counterpane of old white Italian brocade lay across the bed—strange covering for a man who had slept ten years under cowhides. Big jars of tulips here and there—a room for a visitor. He paid no attention to his surroundings; he looked at her dumbly, as though she had him at her mercy, waiting for her instructions.

"My room's just here, dearest——" She went before him to fling open the door. The large, elegant, virginal room gleamed inimically at the man from Canada; the narrow single bed, the evidence of feminine luxury mocked at Clive Solway, who had been stranger to such things for ten years.

"Do you like it? Do you think it's pretty?" Anything to break the silence.

He swung round to face her, his hands in his pockets.

"I thought we might take a cottage somewhere—spend a month in the country, before we go back."

"That would be nice," she agreed, faintly. She must tell him, of course, at once.

Supper was waiting—they were too late for dinner. She did things quickly, elegantly, with a chafing dish; the table was spread with a miracle of coloured crystals; table napkins of sheer damask and little kidney-shaped salad plates evidenced refinements forgotten by Clive Solway. She had wine, too—a fine Bollinger ran over into the delicate glasses, themselves pale golden, like halves of a grape fruit. His lips unlocked by its magic, Clive began to talk of the ranch, of its prospects.

"Another five years and we'll be well off. I'll be able to put a manager in, and sit back and find a place for us to take our ease. You'll love the ranch, Di! The space—the blueness—I never quite believed in all that, until I got out there. Wherever you go there's always the distance—the bit you can't reach. And I've found a horse for you. Hussar, he's called. Bay, with white socks—a nice brute."

After supper she told him, looking at her hands, which were locked on her knees. There was so long a silence that she had to glance up to see how he had taken it.

Clive was on his feet, grinning at the Lalique Aphrodite which made of the mantelpiece a shrine of beauty. The patient angel had gone from his eyes, and in its place reigned a mocking devil.

"I see," he said, very quietly. "I see."

She felt his scorn blistering the things she had grown to love. His eyes stripped their beauty from them—as a chisel strips veneer from unworthy wood.

"I suppose it wasn't to be expected you'd leave all this stuff to make a home for me."

"You don't understand!" she flung at him; adding more gently: "Darling, you *don't* understand. I'd burn the whole lot to-morrow—just to be with you."

"Oh, don't talk rot," he retorted, crudely—rudely.

"Clive, you've got to understand this. Nothing—nothing here matters to me at all. How can I make you believe it? Look!" She rose abruptly. On the wall hung a panel of Chinese embroidery; she loved the Chinese and their tradition. She unhooked the precious thing from its row of scarlet-headed pins. "Look, Clive; it's heavenly, isn't it? All that jade, and then the salmon pink, and the startling little bits of blue; no one can use blue the way the Chinese do. Tam says it's at least four centuries old. It's worth—God knows how much. Look."

Before he could guess her object she had flung it on the fire. The smoke belched over it. Clive, with an exclamation, bent and snatched it from the flames—too late.

"What on earth did you do that for?"

"I wanted to show you that even a thing like that doesn't matter."

"Then what matters?"

"I've told you. My work—Hawkrigg and Blundell. Clive, you can't blame me—all these years, these long, lonely years—for building up a life of my own. You can't really expect me to give it all up now."

"But you knew I was coming for you."

"You said we'd be able to spend half the year in England, and the rest on the ranch. Now you are asking me to go back with you and spend another five years on the ranch! Clive, how can I? Can't you see it would be waste? Waste of myself—of this me that I have made? Here I'm useful—even necessary; people depend on me; I mean bread-and-butter to them. On the ranch I'd simply be a dead-weight—a luxury——"

"I suppose a rancher isn't entitled to luxuries?" he threw at her bitterly.

"Just another five years; what are they? God knows, we're used to waiting. We're not children any longer—impatient and headstrong. Surely the years have shown us the things that are worth while?" Her fingers twisted together in the silken lap of her gown. He looked at her—at Diana, the luxury woman, who had replaced the jolly child in a beret who tumbled through ditches and over fences with him. "Surely," she pleaded, "they've clarified things for us—shown us reality instead of sentiment?"

"What do you call reality?" A little acrid smile twitched the muscles at the corner of his mouth. She turned her head away.

"Solidity; establishment; space to live in a dignified fashion; space for one's mind as well as one's body."

"I'm offering you life on a ranch. Most women would consider there was plenty of space about that!"

"You're being literal on purpose. I don't mean that kind of space. The material doesn't count—except in so far as it affects the spiritual. I'm not brought up to that sort of living, Clive. I could do with it for a little while, and then—something would go wrong; everything would be spoilt—our love—everything——"

"I don't think you'd better talk about our love," he said, dangerously. "I see—at least, I think I see, some of your point of view. What do you actually suggest as a compromise?"

"Why can't I stay on here until you're ready? In a year or two I could begin looking for a house, getting it ready for us both; somewhere near Sevenoaks, perhaps—that would be country, but near enough to town for my work. I could have it ready by the time you came home—" Her voice trailed away.

"You want it all your way, don't you? I don't quite see myself giving up my way, either. You've spoken of loneliness, of lonely years. I guess I could tell you something about that! I'm not inclined for five more years of it."

"Then——"

"It's like this, isn't it?" His voice was gentle now, almost reasonable. "If you pick someone for a job, and they don't hold it down, you find someone else, don't you?"

A chill ran through her; the knuckles stood out white on the backs of her clenched hands. She heard the jerky scratch of a match being struck, and a cigarette case—a little, shabby thing of worn leather—appeared under her nose. Mechanically, she helped herself, recognizing, as she did so, one of her own presents to Clive. A rough circle, cut with a penknife in the left-hand pocket, showed her an old snapshot of herself, young, curly headed, with a defenceless sort of smile that angered her now. He made no comment, snapping the case and shoving it in his pocket, as he held the match to her cigarette.

"It's pretty easy to understand. You prefer Hawkrigg and Blundell to the job of being my wife. I'm not blaming you. A rancher's wife doesn't have much of a time, on the whole. Luckily, some women don't stop to think about that."

"Are you trying to tell me that you've got—someone else?" she said, trying to keep her voice steady.

"I've been faithful to you in word and deed and thought for ten years. It was foolish of me, perhaps——"

"Clive!"

"You see, I never thought of my fidelity being a sort of millstone round your neck. You needn't worry; we'll alter that."

"You're in love with someone?"

He shook his head.

"Perhaps it sounds rotten to say it, but she's—well, she cares for me. I've known it a long time. I think we can

make it easy for you, Di, then you can get on with things your own way."

The implication of his words was unmistakable.

"You mean—a divorce! It's ridiculous, Clive!"

"Not a bit. We made a mistake when we were youngsters, and you've found it out first. The best thing will be to get out of it as cleanly as we can. Think it over." He pushed back his cuff with one finger—oh, remembered gesture!—to look at the time. "I think I'll be pushing along now. Find a hotel. I'll give you a ring to let you know where I am. Good night, my dear."

"Oh, Clive—" Her strength was ebbing from her. "It's all so different——"

"From what we'd expected? Life's like that."

She sat alone, crouched over the dying fire. The settee, its cushions crushed by Clive's big body, stood opposite, mocking her with emptiness. For the moment her sorrow was her own. Presently Tam would have to know, and Stephen Hawkrigg—perhaps she would marry Stephen, the smooth, polite, precious Stephen, with his tortoiseshell glasses, his crinkly hair, and little parrot nose; with his Society connections and devotion to the conventions!

She was meeting Tam next day for lunch. Tam had appointed her favourite restaurant in Soho—a place of discretion, parcelled off in little boxes. She could imagine how Tam's mouth would be watering for news. The aroma of food, as she pushed open the swing doors, nearly turned her sick.

"Now," said Tam, when they found themselves alone. She licked her lips like a cat with a bowl of cream. Diana could see that she was avid for confidences. She heard herself speaking a few bald sentences, saw Tam's face changing to an almost ludicrous mask of disappointment. She gave a little hard laugh, and raised her glass to her lips.

"So that's that, you see. It's over—before it's begun."

"But it isn't over! Do you mean to tell me that after waiting all these years, you've thrown him over?"

"He's thrown me over—shown me I'm superfluous. It's rather funny, isn't it?"

"But it must be your fault some way," insisted Tam, with the candour of a privileged friendship. "What did you tell him?"

"That I saw no reason for throwing up all my work to bury myself alive for five years on the ranch. What else could I say? It's the truth. It doesn't mean I've stopped caring for him——"

"*Fool!*" said Tam, so violently that a young man in the next box craned his head to see what was going on next door. He saw a white-faced girl with her fingers curled round the stem of a wineglass, and rake-hell eyes that stared blindly ahead of her, and he saw the unmistakable features of Tamar Corey, which decorated nineteen out of twenty magazines—swelled and flushed to the limits of recognition. He was quite thrilled, and felt cheated as Tam dropped her voice.

"*Care!* You're *crazy* for Clive Solway, and you can't see it for yourself! What's kept you an honest woman for ten years, if it wasn't love for Clive? You may be an oyster, Di Blundell, but all oysters yield to the knife, if it's properly applied. Don't I know about Louis Crauford?—and Stephen? With either of them you could have had a whale of a good time, on your own terms, and you wouldn't, because of Clive. And now you let him pull this stuff on you! You're an idiot. You don't know your own mind."

"I know enough," she answered stubbornly, "to see what would happen if I went out there to be with Clive. Think what my life has been, Tam: ten years in the thick of things, ten years of fighting——"

"Aye, fighting!" broke in Tam. "There you've hit it! Fighting! It's the fight you love! You wouldn't have given a damn for Hawkrigg and Blundell if it had dropped into your mouth the week after I found you snivelling in an A.B.C. with tuppence ha'penny in your pocket! Battle's your breath of life, Diana—yet you haven't the wit to see that Clive's offering you the best chance of a fight that ever came your way. Hawkrigg and Blundell! That's baby stuff in comparison. You've finished your fighting, so far as that's concerned. I know. Stephen was my friend before he was yours, and he's told me. Hawkrigg and Blundell's like the Bank of England now. It can't go wrong. And you're like a clockwork figure, wound up to go on fighting—against air!"

"That isn't true, Tam!"

"Tscha! Let me speak. You can't live without fighting, Di; people with hair your colour are like that. You're

such a fighter you even fight your friends—even the man you love! You've been grand. But there's a point where grandeur becomes folly—and you've reached it."

"You mean to suggest that I should go out and moulder on a Canadian sheep-farm, when five more years would mean security, decent living, a proper home for us, and the children if we had any——"

"That will come with the end of Clive's battle. You're not the only fighter, Diana. I've seen his letters, remember—or bits of them. He's asking you to come in with him for the last round. I guess it will be a gruelling one. Both your futures hang on it. Besides, you have a private war of your own to wage."

"What do you mean?"

"Over a woman of whose love Clive is conscious; who is ready to take your place; who is probably gambling this minute on the chance of your not returning with him."

"Too late for that, Tam," said Diana with a little, bitter smile. Tam returned it, but there was geniality and a world of wisdom in her own.

"It's never too late for the wife who means business," she said quietly. "The dice are loaded in her favour from the start."

The office drove Diana mad that afternoon, with its slimy efficiency. There seemed nothing to battle over. Diana nearly cried out: "My God, what am I here for?" She recalled the conversation with Tam. Had she really exhausted the sphere of her usefulness? Was she free at last—free to love Clive—who had found another woman to love him?

Her fingers crisped suddenly; she looked down at them in astonishment. Pale pink palms, smooth like shells, and nails that gleamed like mother-o'-pearl. She had always taken care of her hands; her vanity centred in them. "Pale hands I loved—" Clive had sung that sometimes, in loving mockery, when they failed in the attempt to pit their strength against his own. The woman who loved Clive would be big, muscular, calm. Men always went in for opposites. With hands that looked as though they could do things.

Fools of hands! Her sense of frustration centred itself in her own. No use on a ranch! No use to control a lively



bay horse, called Hussar ! But as each finger bent itself into a little pointed arc, she knew with a thrill that they were primitive hands. She thought of the face of the woman who loved Clive—of her eyes. A little exclamation of horror broke from Diana. That, after thirty years of civilization, one could think of such things !

Next morning she did a thing she had never done in the ten years of her business career : she rang up the office and said she was not coming down. There was no message from Clive ; he had not kept his word about letting her know where he was staying. Here, in London, he was more utterly lost to her than when the sea rolled between them.

She could settle to nothing. About the middle of the morning the telephone tickled, and she flew to answer it.

"Miss Blundell ? This is Lemesurier's." After a moment of confusion she recognized the name of a photographer who had taken her portrait for a Christmas publication that featured "Woman in the Literary Limelight."

"We've had an application for a print from one of your negatives, Miss Blundell. We said we'd have to get your permission, as it wasn't for the Press. A Mr. Solway."

Her heart nearly stopped beating before she got out the words.

"That's all right. What address did he give ?"

"None. He's calling for the print on Wednesday."

Her mind worked quickly. The reception clerk at Lemesurier's was a friend of hers ; she clutched the receiver more tightly.

"Are you there, Miss Morris ?"

"Yes, Miss Blundell."

"If Mr. Solway comes in, I want you to give me a ring—at my office—and detain him until I come along. It's important. Will you remember ?"

"All right, Miss Blundell." There was a little note of interest and curiosity in the girl's voice. Diana rang off.

Her heart beat in her throat, all through that interminable Wednesday morning, each time the telephone at her elbow purred. Shortly before noon the expected call came.

"Mr. Solway's here, Miss Blundell. He's waiting for the print. I'm afraid we shan't be able to keep him long—he says he has an appointment——"

"All right," panted Diana. She was unconscious of the secretary's amazement as she sprang up and hurried from the room without explanation.

Fortune favoured her; a taxi was crawling along the kerb, having deposited its fare on the opposite side of the street. She sat tensed as it gathered speed and nosed westwards through the traffic. Her one chance of seeing Clive. Oh, God, would they manage to detain him?

The girl at the reception desk stared as Diana rushed into the room; a Diana Blundell she did not know—surely not Miss Blundell of Hawkkrigg and Blundell, that formidable and autocratic lady, whose visits were events, even to a firm like Lemesurier?

"Mr. Solway? Oh, I'm so sorry, Miss Blundell; he's just gone—he seemed to be in a great hurry. We had to give him the print—he wouldn't wait any longer."

Out on the pavement she felt her knees giving. Clive! Hardly conscious where her feet were carrying her, she hurried into the roar of Knightsbridge; she was lost, lost—but determined to seek him to the limits of the earth.

Then she saw him, standing on an island in the middle of the road; there was something baffled in the set of his broad shoulders. How much older he looked, out of doors! The fight had marked *him*; had stolen from him the arrogance of his bearing. An alien to London, trapped in its relentless machinery. In his hand he carried a large, stiff envelope.

She did not care, as she darted into the road, that her life was imperilled; she did not even feel the mudguard of a taxi, as it scraped her coat, the driver lurching and swearing, grinding on his brakes. She and Clive were alone on the island, staring at each other with the startled recognition of wild things; the traffic slowed to a standstill at the bidding of a white-armed policeman; a lull fell upon Knightsbridge, of which Diana and Clive were not aware, as she took the envelope from his hand and slowly stripped it into pieces, which she dropped on the ground. The wind blew little militant red curls about her brow as she looked up into his eyes, and the old Diana spoke, through lips passionately tender:

"You don't need that, darling; I'm coming in with you—for the last round."



KATHLYN RHODES

*The Red Slippers*

The novels and stories of Kathlyn Rhodes are known to a wide circle of readers, and some of them have been filmed successfully. Her books include *Sweet Life*, *Desert Dreamers*, *East o' the Sun*, *The Valley of Enchantment*, and a number of school stories for girls.



## THE RED SLIPPERS

IN certain Mahometan countries it is the custom for a husband to glance outside his wife's door before he enters her apartment. Should he see a pair of red slippers there he knows that she has with her a visitor of her own sex; and he withdraws immediately to wait until that visitor shall have departed.

This is the story of the occasion when Sadok Ali found the red slippers outside his wife Zoraida's apartment; and what befell the wearer thereof.

Zoraida was the only daughter of the goldsmith Ishabil; and surely so fair a plant never before blossomed in so austere a garden.

Already at fourteen she was half a woman—slim and brown and fragile. The peach bloom of her cheeks, the sparkle of her lustrous eyes spoke eloquently of the careless freedom of childhood, and yet ever and again a hint of womanhood flashed in those same brown velvety eyes, or in the curves of a mouth which seemed formed for love and passion.

In Eastern countries the women come early to their heritage. At an age when English girls are yet at school, playing childish games, learning childish lessons, the girls of the East are already wives and mothers—poor, unformed, perplexed little mothers, it is true, but still separated for ever from the careless, unthinking days of childhood.

Zoraida, the goldsmith's daughter, was no exception. At the age of thirteen she was veiled in accordance with the custom of her tribe, and at once entered the ranks of marriageable maidens, on whom the cautious fathers of the village cast inquiring or envious eyes, not forgetting to make tentative inquiries as to the price demanded by the relatives of the aforesaid maidens.

The sum required by the goldsmith for the hand of his beautiful little daughter was large—but so was the sum of

her accomplishments. Not only could she sing sweetly, accompanying herself on the *darbouka*, but she could recite whole pages of the Koran, an almost unheard of feat in that land of Moslem women; and in addition she could weave a burnous with such deft and skilful fingers that the garment became the envy of her friends, and gained her a kudos which no amount of musical genius could have brought.

Many were the offers made to the goldsmith her father; large sums of money were mentioned; and even the grasping Ishabil's soul was content with the offer made by Sadok Ali—an elderly widower of patriarchal aspect, with thick, once-black beard streaked with grey, with dark eyes still bright in spite of his sixty years, and with lean, sinewy hands still strong enough to chastise a disobedient wife or choke the life out of a marauding lover.

Great was Zoraida's woe when the fiat went forth that she must wed Sadok Ali, the twice-bereft. She had seen him often in her father's shop—had herself handed him the cups of mint-flavoured tea or the sticky Arab coffee which made up the sum of the goldsmith's hospitality. As a child, unveiled, she had played her little games in front of him, all unheeding of the greedy eyes which followed her as she ran hither and thither catching her ball, or sat sedately down to weave the cunning threads of her burnous.

She had rarely given him a thought—at most it had been but an instinctive shrinking from the elderly ugliness which was so different from her own peach-like youth; and when, late one night, her father sought her out and made her acquainted with the fact of her approaching marriage, little Zoraida shrank back against the wall with startled eyes, and raised hands of appeal.

"My father, say 'it is not so!'" Good Arab daughter as she was the girl was moved to instant rebellion. "Sadok Ali is a wise and just man, but he is old, and I cannot mate with one who is so far above me—so many years removed from my foolish childishness!"

Ishabil the goldsmith frowned.

"Sadok Ali has offered much money for thee, Zoraida. He is indeed a wise and prudent man and will keep thee safely from all the evil of the world. Old he may be, yet is he strong and lusty, and as his wife thou wilt be happy and respected by all!"

"But I can never love him," faltered the child, raising her eyes imploringly to her stern sire. "Oh, my father, I would fain live a little longer unwed . . . leave me yet a little longer with my friends and companions—life is so sweet when one is young!"

The goldsmith raised his hand angrily. The light from the swinging lamp showed his dark face full of wrath as he gazed on the shrinking white-robed figure before him; and as Zoraida met his cold eyes her head drooped on her chest.

"Peace, daughter!" His voice held a note of finality. "It is the duty of a child to render, and of a father to exact, obedience. I am not as some parents, who have their children beaten into submission. Thou hast rarely felt the lash; yet if at this crisis of thy life thou wilt turn stubborn and headstrong, then shall I regret that I have ever ruled thee by love and kindness rather than by stern parental discipline."

Zoraida's soft heart smote her at the words, which she knew were true. All her life her father had treated her, his only daughter, with so much indulgence that she had been envied by all her contemporaries. He had loaded her with gifts, made light of her childish wrongdoings, and had never allowed her attendants to chastise her as had been their wont with their former charges. With all his outward harshness he had been ever gentle with her; and Zoraida knew, as she stood before him, that she could not now refuse to conform to his wishes, horrible though the very thought must be to her.

"Forgive me, my father." She murmured the words gently as a cooing dove, and the goldsmith's stern face softened.

"Now art thou my own sweet jasmine flower!" He bent forward and kissed her brow. "To-morrow shall Sadok Ali hear the good news, and ere the next new moon thou shalt be wed." He pretended not to notice the shudder which ran through her slim body at the words, and with another parental embrace he left her alone, standing beneath the hanging lamp like some beautiful statue of despair fashioned in bronze.

"Fatmah!" Impatiently she summoned her favourite nurse, an old Nubian woman black as ebony, with a silver ring hanging from one misshapen ear. "Hark! My father has ordained that I wed Sadok Ali, the twice-widowed. Within a month I am to be his bride—the bride of an old



man! Oh, Fatmah, I cannot do it! Thou must help me to escape this horrible fate!"

The Nubian shook her head.

"Nay, my dove, if thy father has ordained it, then the thing must be done. Truly he is a grim bridegroom for thy beauteous youth, yet he is a rich and prosperous man, and in his house thou wilt be lapped in luxury."

The child stared with wide-open, night-dark eyes.

"Thou too, Fatmah! Yet hast thou forgotten my secret—the secret I whispered but yestreen in thine ear?"

Fatmah laid a finger on her lips and looked round hastily.

"Nay, child, speak not so rashly, lest an evil bird overhear thee! Truly do I remember the childish tale of Amaran the flute-player, but that folly must be forgotten now, thou must see the youth no more!"

"But I love him, Fatma," pleaded the girl sadly. "He is so young, so handsome—to hear him play his flute is to hear the soft South wind blowing over the almond trees in my garden, to look into his shining eyes is to gaze into a well of the purest water, the touch of his hand is as the caress of a rose-petal. Were I to become his bride——"

The old woman uttered an angry exclamation.

"Now thou talkest folly, wickedness!" She spoke crossly. "Had I known thy stolen meetings in the garden had led to this naughtiness, I had whipped thee soundly with mine own hands. I had thought it but a childish caprice, excusable in one so lately veiled as thou, but had I but dreamed thou would'st take advantage of my indulgence I had betrayed thee to thy father this week past!"

Even as she spoke a change passed over the downcast face of the child. Until this moment she had believed that Fatmah would help her to avert the terrible fate in front of her, would even aid her to wed the handsome flute player to whom she had yielded her heart in response to his passionate whispers of love. Until this day everything had been made so smooth, so easy to her young feet—life had been so joyous, so free from care; and although she knew well the custom of her people with regard to marriage, she had never really dreamed that she, the petted, indulged Zoraida, would be called upon to wed an old man such as Sadok Ali.

It had been so easy to love Amaran. They had grown up together as girl and boy, no restriction had been placed

on their intercourse as children; and only when the day of her veiling approached, did the two begin to understand their own young hearts.

It was not until the last day of their free intercourse, as they stood together at twilight beneath the orange trees, that they realized the nature of the bond which held them; and with the realization had come swift, sharp joy, and scarcely sharper fear—joy that they knew the meaning of love, fear that such love might well be condemned by those above them.

The boy, a young god of eighteen, with flashing eyes, strong and graceful limbs, a well-poised head and a mouth made up of sweet, eloquent curves, was the son of a shoemaker, a poor, obscure youth who might never raise his eyes to the goldsmith's daughter; and yet in his soul he felt himself to be the true mate for this beautiful, shrinking child who loved him with all her passionate young heart, whose life was meant to be the complement of his own, whose physical beauty was the other half of his supple young perfection.

On the very day of the goldsmith's communication to his daughter, the two children, the girl of fourteen, the boy scarce four years older, had exchanged a kiss . . . the first, the wonderful magic first kiss which changes all the world; and following hard on this thrilling moment of bliss had come to Zoraida the news of her approaching marriage with a grim old man. . . .

All night Zoraida lay awake, seeing visions in the soft darkness; and very early she arose, and scarcely daring to move lest she awake her attendant, plunged her face into the rose-scented water in her ewer, wrapped round her a white, trailing garment made of the finest wool, and slipped out of the house into the pearly dawn.

It was very early, so early that the Muezzin had not yet greeted the sunrise; but the East was growing pink as though a hundred little rose petals were thrown upon the sky, and she knew there was no time to waste.

Through the gardens she slipped, bare-footed, until she reached the orange grove; and there, in accordance with the promise exacted the previous night, waited Amaran, young and splendid in the opal dawn, a spray of jasmine above his ear, his supple fingers playing with the flute whose music he dared not yet awaken.

At the sight of his beloved's sad little face he started forward.

"What ails thee, my moon flower, my soft-eyed gazelle!" The sweet names tripped lightly off his tongue. "At sunset last eve we parted merrily, yet in the space of a few short hours I find thee pale and wan as the young moon in the month of Ramadan!"

"Ah, my beloved, much has happened in so short a space," sighed Zoraida, yielding herself to his tender clasp. "I am betrothed—my father has arranged for me to become the bride of Sadok Ali within a month, and thou knowest that I must obey my father."

Long they talked in the scented gloom of the orange groves. With passionate words and caresses he besought her to defy her father—knowing well enough that such defiance was impossible in that tradition-haunted land. Even he could not but recognize that the girl's fate was sealed, but love will hear no reason when the blood is hot with youth's impetuosity; and with all his young manhood he loved the fragile child who had given him her soul.

Yet talk, rage, weep as he might, he could do nothing; and since it was certain that the girl would be strictly guarded during the remaining weeks of her maidenhood both realized that this must be their final meeting.

Once realizing this they gave themselves up to love's last sad raptures. She lay passively in his arms as he kissed her madly, murmuring fond, poetic words of love; and then, her turn coming at length, she surprised even her adoring young lover by the intensity of her caresses.

But with full day they parted, Zoraida to flee back like a pale ghost to her dainty chamber, the boy to roam over the desert sand, broken-hearted, with only his faithful pipe to bear him company.

Whether or no old Fatmah's suspicions had been aroused Zoraida could not tell; yet never once, during those last few weeks, was the nurse's vigilance relaxed; and it would have been impossible for the lovers to meet, even had they planned anything so mad.

Heavily passed the days for the bride to be; and her rounded cheeks grew thin, her limbs lost some of their symmetry, in spite of all the fattening dainties, the honey balls tintured with aniseed, the rich sweetmeats, the nourish-

ing *cons-cons* which Fatmah pressed daily upon her charge.

Even her father was touched by her wan aspect; and though relaxing no iota of his power over her he was strangely tender with his only daughter during those last days of her girlhood beneath his roof.

At last the marriage ceremonies came. The preliminaries had all been settled, gifts exchanged, the rooms of the bride newly carpeted and hung with rich silken tapestries. On the last day of her childhood she went with her friends to the Baths, there to spend the last remaining hours among their half-envious, half-superior chatter and twittering laughter.

Nothing was omitted which could add lustre to the nuptials of the goldsmith's daughter; and when the velvety night fell, soft and caressing, over the desert village where the sweet South wind played in the orange trees, and every breeze, every flower, every star spoke of love, then Zoraida's doom was fulfilled, and she became the possession of the elderly Sadok Ali.

For many moons after that Zoraida went sadly in the house of her bridegroom. True, he treated her with kindness, loaded her with gifts, yet ever he exacted instant obedience to all his whims, and as the days passed she grew spiritless and timid, obeying ever with listless indifference.

In truth her little heart was breaking within her breast, breaking for love of Amaran, the flute player. She saw him no more, for the days of her freedom were over, and she took all her exercise in her own garden or on the flat roof of her dwelling place. But though she saw him not she dreamed of him during the long, languorous hours, and his image was rarely far from her mind.

And then one day, when hope was nearly dead, when she was beginning to sink into a true Oriental apathy, a miracle happened.

As she sat idly on the roof, watching the kites wheel round the dome of the little white-washed mosque beneath, she heard the strains of a flute. . . .

Running to the edge of the roof she peered over into the garden below her. No one was in sight save a gardener sweeping up the fallen rose-petals from the smooth sand paths. She looked in vain for her adored flute player, and suddenly the gardener raised his head . . . and lo, the velvety brown eyes of Amaran looked into her eyes, the sweet,

passionate lips of Amaran breathed the one word—"Beloved!"—and instantly the world turned once more from the dreary desert into an enchanted garden.

Bish' Allah! But it was dangerous!

Yet love laughs at danger, thrives upon it; and so the affair prospered as do those of true lovers who risk their all for the gratification of their love.

None knew Amaran in the house of Sadok. He had been too poor, too obscure for any to take note of him; and now as the gardener of the rich Sadok Ali he came and went unchallenged. Only he took care that none saw him raise his eyes to the roof on which his beloved lay, dreaming now so happily!—and indeed more hasty lovers would have been discontented with the scanty rewards which were all his devotion could win. But he knew the difficulties, the dangers which beset their path; and for the sake of just one moment in the day he served the man who had stolen his all.

For nigh upon a month, while the moon, a wan ghost at first, waxed and grew into the semblance of a large, round ruby, paling again into a faint, delicate pearl, the lovers' idyll continued. A stolen glance, a murmur, a sprig of jasmine flower—that was all; and Sadok Ali noticed no change in his gentle child wife. She was ever docile, ever submissive, a little languid; but her beauty enchained him still, he found rare entertainment in the possession of her ripe young charms.

One day Sadok Ali sought his wife as she lay in her apartment turning over some silken embroideries; and when he had greeted her he broke to her the news he had brought.

"To-night I go a journey," he said. "In the village of Sidi Oura, three days' march, my presence is required to settle a family dispute. Within a week I shall return. In the meantime I must leave thee, but I know thou wilt be discreet and obedient as a good wife should be; and my servants will guard thee carefully until I return."

"My lord's pleasure shall be done," she murmured gently; and the old man was satisfied, knowing nothing of the wild and delirious joy which pierced her heart at the vision of freedom.

It was easy, after all, to hoodwink her jailors. With

the subtlety of an Eastern woman she laid her plan, so simple that it was masterly.

At times she had received her former friends in her apartments, and when her lord saw the red slippers outside her door he knew he was for the moment forbidden to enter the chamber in which the women laughed and talked.

A whisper over the roof, a murmur to her woman that her friend Marsinah would visit her that evening to relate the particulars of her recent betrothal—and the way was clear. True, the name of Marsinah was unknown to her servants, but they had no reason to suspect the quiet, sad-eyed little wife; and in due time the visitor arrived, a shapeless bundle of white, waddling in her red slippers as do other Arab women, and was conducted to the presence of the so-called mistress of the house.

It was natural that after sipping the mint-flavoured tea the friends should desire solitude to discuss the intimate secrets of a late betrothal; and so well did both play their parts that the servants withdrew unsuspectingly, first placing the visitor's red slippers outside the door lest by any chance the master should return.

So easy proved the way to Paradise for those two young lovers!

Day by day for nigh upon a week the sweet danger continued. At sunset the visitor would arrive, often by way of the steps leading to the flat roof-top; and in her gorgeous apartments Zoraida lay on her cushions, with warm, glowing cheeks and dark, bright eyes full of passion and love and contentment.

At the end of a week came a message from Sadok Ali, borne by a rider on a swift camel. The master of the house found it impossible to return for yet a week. He sent presents, great uncut opals, full of fire, a necklace of green jade, a wonderful veil, gold-embroidered; many things he sent by the hand of the Kabyle messenger; but best of all his gifts came the assurance of his continued absence.

"Another week, oh my beloved! Another seven days of bliss!" She sighed out the words as she lay on his breast, and his arms tightened round her as he replied:

"Yet another seven days, oh my moon flower—but then? After the sunshine the sand storm, after the fruitful garden the dreary dunes of the desert . . . nay, my gazelle,

I cannot give thee up ! Shall his leathery lips touch the soft fragrance of thine—shall his withered arms press thy sweet youth to his shrivelled bosom—shall the love which to us is a chain of rose-petals become once more the clanging iron fetters ?”

She wept softly in his embrace.

“Nay, say no more, beloved one. Thou knowest I must remain—did I fly with thee, Sadok Ali would pursue us and kill us both ; my father, too, would suffer for my guilt. Nay—I must remain—and we have yet seven days——”

And in a passionate embrace they forgot all else. Yet even in their love they remembered to be cautious ; and none suspected that the robe and veil of Marsinah hid the slim form and glowing eyes of Amaran the flute-player.

But it chanced that Sadok Ali’s business was completed on the third day ; and so it happened that at sunset on the sixth evening of the second week he rode up to the jasmine-covered gate of his garden. Over the white walls hung masses of rich purple bougainvillea ; as the gates were opened by the ready *boub* he saw a vision of smooth sand paths, great scarlet poinsettias, vivid orange and pink nasturtiums. All was quiet, orderly, refreshing, to eyes wearied by the arid sand of the desert ; and Sadok Ali dismounted from his horse feeling at peace with all the world. Within half an hour he would hold his lovely bride in his arms, and his eyes brightened, his thick lips relaxed at the pictures his imagination spread before him.

First to remove all traces of travel. Then a hasty meal—and he was ready to seek his beautiful Zoraida’s arms.

But outside her door lay a pair of red slippers, and his impatience was perforce checked at the sight.

Summoning a Nubian he asked the name of the visitor.

“One Sitt’ Marsinah, a friend of the Sitt’ Zoraida,” answered the man unsuspiciously, and for a moment the master of the house hesitated.

Then——

“So be it. It is seemly that the visitor should depart ere I seek my bride.” He turned away as he spoke. “Do thou remain here and when the lady shall have gone bring me tidings.”

He withdrew ; and the Nubian squatted on his haunches outside the door to wait with true Oriental patience.

Now it so happened that the lovers were careless this evening. Lulled into a false security by the continued absence of her lord, Zoraida laughed and chatted gaily with her handsome flute player, raising her voice higher than was wise; and he, forgetting all but her beauty and her charm, forgot also to lower his ringing tones to the soft twitter which hitherto they had employed.

The giant black outside listened, at first idly, then more carefully, to the chatter within the apartment; and suddenly a new look flashed across his ebony features.

That was no woman's voice, no soft girlish whisper. That was a boy's ardent tone, a sonorous young voice speaking of love and passion in every note.

Yet who would dare so to defile his mistress's sacred apartments?

He sprang to his feet, ready to dare all and dash into the room to rescue the young bride from her perilous position, when on his ear stole the voice of a woman speaking to her beloved.

"Nay, go not so soon, oh my heart's delight! Stay yet a little while—the tyrant is still afar off, and there are two days ere he ride in upon us once again!"

And the Nubian, listening, heard the soft, murmured reply of Amaran, heard even the meeting of their lips; and with a muttered exclamation he moved swiftly, flat-footed, down the long corridor to summon his lord.

At first Sadok Ali was as one stricken by a mortal blow. That his bride, the gentle young gazelle which he had tamed to his hand should prove false, a traitress, was wellnigh unbelievable, and yet when he, too, stood outside the door and heard the whispers, the soft laughter in which the doomed lovers indulged, his brow grew black as night, his fingers plucked angrily at his short dagger.

"Death, death short and swift for both," he muttered in his beard. "But for her the cruellest pang—she shall see her lover slain before her eyes."

The Nubian, fearing for his own safety, anxious to make amends for the carelessness which had made this thing possible, offered a hesitating suggestion by which the fullest payment might be exacted; and after a moment's thought Sadok Ali fell in with the plan, a terrible look upon his face.



A moment later the young lovers were disturbed by a gentle tapping on the door.

"Enter," called Zoraida softly, suspecting nothing; and the giant eunuch entered, salaaming.

The alleged Marsinah reclined on a divan in a dark corner, her veil modestly hiding her face; and though Zoraida was flushed and glowing there was as yet no fear in her velvety eyes.

"I bring news, oh Sitt' Zoraida," said the black obsequiously. "My lord hath returned and would fain seek the presence of the Gracious One."

Now for an instant Zoraida's face grew pale.

"My lord has returned—but it is not yet the time." Even as she spoke she knew the tidings were true.

"He has returned," repeated the Nubian stolidly, and waited as though to learn her pleasure.

With beating heart she expressed her readiness to meet her lord. One moment's grace, that her visitor might vanish before the advent of the master of the house, and she would receive that master with all due eagerness.

"The Sitt' Marsinah leaves by the roof?"

Zoraida bowed her head in acquiescence, and the black withdrew, holding the door open that the visitor might reclaim her slippers.

Zoraida hastily snatched them from the floor, and in a moment the door was shut and the two were alone.

"Hasten, oh my beloved!" She was white with terror. "If he should find thee here death would be thy portion!"

"I fear not death," said Amaran sombrely. "No life without thee is worth living, oh jasmine-flower. Sooner the swift pang which sets me free."

Yet in response to her entreaties he hastened to assume the slippers; and then, drawing his garments closely about him, he took a lingering farewell of his beloved, and stepped through the windowless aperture, framed in meshrabiyyeh work, on to the flat, petunia-filled roof.

Strangely delayed was Sadok Ali in his visit to his waiting bride. The brief twilight deepened into the mysterious night, the stars hung, like white pearls, in the dusky sky, sweet odours rose from the sleeping garden, and yet Sadok came not to his wife's chamber.

Fear, cold and grim, fell on the heart of Zoraida as she waited, crouching on her deep divan. Her reason told her that she had nothing to fear, for had her lover's presence been detected he had not been allowed to leave the dwelling; and yet there was something sinister in this continued silence; and at last she could bear it no longer.

Rising, she called her women and bade them light the lamps which hung from the ceiling; and scarcely had they done her bidding when the door opened to admit her husband.

"I am come, oh my fair one!" To her excited fancy his voice was ominous in its very suavity. "Pardon me that I have tarried so long, but the dust and stain of travel take long to efface, and I would not enter thy presence till I could do so in seemly fashion."

She submitted, perforce, to his embrace, but her lips were cold as those of a day-old corpse.

"I have brought thee gifts of divers kind," he said when she had murmured her dutiful greetings. "The servants shall, with thy permission, bring them in for thy inspection," and moving to the door he clapped his hands loudly.

Instantly half a dozen attendants were at hand, bearing various small coffers, and in a moment great stores of treasures were laid before the shrinking girl's eyes. Veils, jewels, strange ornaments, richly encrusted embroideries, and priceless rings, were the tribute of Sadok Ali to his bride; and she strove desperately to make her simulated gratitude sound real as she fingered the cloths, hung herself about with the trinkets. Yet ever Sadok Ali's eyes were on her face; and in their depths she read something which made her blood turn to ice in her veins.

"Now thou hast seen all but the most precious." He signed to a servant, who rose swiftly to his feet. "Go thou and fetch the inlaid coffer of which we spoke together; but walk carefully that thou damage not the contents."

The Nubian, he who had guarded the door, vanished silently; and for three long moments the room was full of a grim and deadly silence, in which Zoraida's heart beat with a suffocating terror, though what she feared she knew not.

When the black returned he bore a large square chest, inlaid with ivory and silver, which, obedient to a gesture, he placed at his mistress's feet.

"Now, my Zoraida." Sadok spoke playfully. "Here is

my last and best treasure—one which will delight even thy fickle little heart. Open it, I pray thee—I would fain dwell upon thy raptures !”

Cold to the heart with a new and sudden dread the girl put out her slender brown hands and raised the lid of the coffer slowly, fearing to find some nameless horror within. . . .

Inside were folds upon folds of thin white material, which as she began to lift them out fell into the shape of a flowing veil . . . and in their folds lay a pair of red slippers—both innocent and ordinary presents enough, but yet . . .

With a cry she withdrew her fingers, holding them to the light, moaning in horror at the ghastly stain which clung to them; and then, seized with a maddening terror, she dragged the veil wildly out of the box, and found, at last, the measure of her husband’s revenge.

The severed head lay before her . . . the open eyes, glazing now, stared at her with an impotent appeal in their depths . . . his shining curls were dabbled in his own blood . . . the blood which was on her hands—his lips were parted as though at the last moment of his life they had breathed her name . . . and thus Amaran came back to Zoraida, the goldsmith’s daughter.

“So !” With a cry the elderly husband sprang upon his wife and seized her by her slender throat. “He was thy lover—thou didst betray the honour of Sadok Ali for his sake ! But he will embrace thee no more—his ears are for ever deaf to thy lamentations—look well upon him, mark his stiffening brow, his lips which will soon be cold as clay. No more shalt thou lie in his arms—mine only shall be the arms which shall enfold thee now . . . for me shall be thy kisses and caresses—he has cheated me of many, but for the future thy love shall be for me—the sweetness of thy breath, the warmth of thy body, the softness of thy breast are for me alone—and by the Beard of the Prophet I will have my due !”

Slowly she raised her head and gazed at him with expressionless eyes.

“Thou wilt not kill me, oh my lord ?”

“Nay !” He chuckled fiendishly. “At first I had meant

to slay thee with mine own hands, but a better plan came to me. Death is too merciful for such as thou. No, thou shalt live, live to endure my caresses, to pay me for my clemency by a thousand dutiful embraces ! I will leave thee no more, day and night shalt thou be by my side, waking and sleeping shalt thou pay thy debt through thy soft youth and grace !”

At the words a horror came over Zoraida. Never again could she, who had sat at the Feast of Love, endure to taste his counterfeit. The thought of her bondage to this man was repellent, the touch of his lips, of his arms, would be an outrage, a sacrilege from which every fibre of her body shrank. Did he embrace her, she would die of repulsion, of loathing ; and now that Amaran was dead her only desire was to die too, to pass away as the jasmine flower fades, as the scented rose falls into a thousand crimson petals.

Before any present guessed her intention she had flung herself upon her lord ; and ere any could seize her she had plucked the short dagger from his girdle and plunged it into her own soft breast.

“Thus—and thus do I escape thy loathsome caresses,” she cried as she struck. “Amaran—Amaran ! I am still thine own !” And with the words she sank in a pool of blood at her husband’s feet.

This is the true story of the fatal passion of Zoraida the goldsmith’s daughter and Amaran the flute player ; and even to-day in that far-off desert village grave husbands repeat the tale to young and giddy wives, drawing a moral from the shocking fate of the lovers, lest some foolish bride should feel disposed to imitate the deception of Zoraida and place the red slippers of a reckless lover outside her chamber door.



ELINOR MORDAUNT

*The Little Hour*

Elinor Mordaunt has wandered far and wide over the world—Mauritius, Australia, New Guinea, the Dutch East Indies, Africa, Siam and Central America—often travelling unconventionally by tramp steamer or sailing ship, and has found inspiration for novels and stories everywhere. Her most recent books are *Traveller's Pack* and *Purely for Pleasure*.



## THE LITTLE HOUR

THIS story seems to be all preamble, and it would be of no use whatever to offer it to a magazine. For magazines demand stories in which something is happening all the time, in which spark follows spark, as in a firework. All the same it is real life; for real life is one long preamble toward one day—maybe but one hour—while what remains is merely the sequel; though Vicente's history was even less balanced, for the preamble threatened to tail on for ever, and in the end there was no sequel.

I knew him well and regarded him—well, slightly, for he did not seem the sort of person to be taken seriously. He was by nature, by chance, by instinct and habit, cosmopolitan, and I myself—rather stodgy English as I am—prefer something more definitely nationalized: with all virtues and failings proper to its race.

Still, it was scarcely his fault. Born in Costa Rica, of a Spanish mother and Italian father, he was sent home when he was but nine years of age, to Trieste—of all places—in charge of a Jesuit Father to be educated. Two other brothers, one a year younger and one three years older, were sent home with him. But for some reason or other the youngest of the three, Vicente's special crony, went to Rome, possibly to some relations.

It seemed that this boy was delicate and very young for his age, and that my friend adored him. Indeed he told me that for months after the parting he used to feel as though one side of him—the side against which the little chap used to nestle at night, for they always slept together—were raw, actually raw, as though it had been flayed.

At first, as Vicente said, he was filled with pride at going to Europe without his parents; but later on, even before he was parted from his brother, in the close confines of the ship—which depressed him so that he felt as though he wanted to



tear plank from plank, spar from spar—with his little heart full of the memories of his mother, of the wide open plains around his own spacious home, the Spanish women servants who petted and spoilt him, the horsemen who took him galloping before them upon their high-fronted saddles—he suffered such agonies of home-sickness that he would lie in his bunk at night and bite into the pillow, already sopped with tears, never quite dry throughout the entire journey; while the peculiarly fusty smell of ship's linen and pillows never failed to bring the whole miserable time back to him, with a potency scarcely to be borne—and the things which one remembers best in life are not those things which would make the faintest impression upon any biographer.

It seemed that his whole life, for years after he first reached Europe, was like a long, desolate dream. If he could have had his little brother to domineer over and pet it might have been different; but there was nothing and nobody, while nothing and nobody seemed altogether real.

Guarded with care without affection, with a minute watchfulness devoid of the slightest personal interest; slowly forgetting all that he had ever known of the ups and downs of home life and a mother's love, he became—as his loneliness, his tempests of despair ceased—at once self-centred and self-contained.

Always in school, always under discipline and surveillance, living according to rule, he developed his brain at the expense of his intelligence; while all initiative was nipped in the bud.

A highly promising scholar, he was for ever being praised and put forward; the praise being without that admixture of love and banter which alone makes it innocuous to a child.

Other boys boasted of their homes, their friends, their relations; after a while nothing appeared quite real enough for young Vicente to boast of apart from his own achievements. True he had his brother, but three years makes a lot of difference in childhood and the other boy seemed almost grown up, aloof among the boys of his own age.

Their only friend was a distant cousin of their father's who used to come to the school and see them one Sunday in every month. But they were never alone together; and it was Vicente's elder brother, a bright, confident, conceited lad, who usurped the conversation; while something in the bulk of their visitor, the solidity of him in his black frockcoat,

the stiff, set thickness of his glossy beard fixed him in the younger boy's mind as one of those people who are not real ; made up of a great deal of very good material, but somehow or other stuffed too tight to allow of any sort of vital spark. And he was always like that—Vicente I mean—I believe that is why people failed to make any distinct impression upon him, they did not seem real : he himself did not seem real to himself.

The elder brother used to talk a great deal of what he was going to be and do when he was grown up, and sometimes the visitor—forcing himself to recollect the younger boy—would turn to him and inquire : “What about you, my little one, what will you be ?” Upon which Vicente would shake his head so vaguely that it might have been thought that he was something of an idiot if it had not been for his place in class, where he was very soon level with the other ; though for all that—as he himself said—he was not so much a student as a piece of mechanism which responded, with accuracy, to the turn of a certain key ; while the deeper side of his intelligence—and I believe it to have been considerable—remained untouched.

If he had gone to school as day boy he would have encountered different types, realized different outlooks : even in an English public school he would have worked with masters whose characters and standards and methods of teaching were entirely different one from another ; but the Holy Fathers were all ironed out to the same semblance, the whole system was like those hot steam-filled rollers with which sheets are pressed ; if there was a fold it was exactly in the same place in every one of them ; they decided nothing for themselves, and their pupils decided nothing for themselves either ; while any furtive conversation that there might have been between the boys was as stupidly obscene as most whispering ; for the rest there was not a single moment of life which was not ruled out and according to law.

Imagine, therefore, what it was like when he left school, went straight to college in Rome, where his little brother had died of fever three years before—and that in itself must have lent a sting, a sort of recklessness ; it was simply that passing straight, as it were, from the cloister to the world of unbridled youth, of wine, of women, he allowed himself to flow with the tide—and remember that all powers of discrimination

had long ago been taken from him, he had never been allowed to be tempted, never learnt resistance ; never even thought of self-denial, when self-denial was the fixed rule for every day and all day. Talk of a young girl fresh from a convent—she would not have been in it with young Vicente, now that the hands which had wound up his young life so tight for so many years had relinquished their task ; for one thing no young girl would have been so completely alone or possessed of so much money ; for that feeding his sons with money, of which he had a superfluity, was old Vicente's one idea of paternal duty.

For five or six years he dissipated, then with the taste of wine stale upon his lips, the arts of women still staler—lifeless as cigarette ends—he suddenly remembered that each twenty-four hours included a morning—and mornings of incomparable freshness, too, as well as a night, books as well as people, quiet hours and that sort of loneliness which is without pain, a balm to the weary.

All the same, now that he found himself in a backwater—and it began with an attack of fever, the very short memories of some of his so-called friends—he was unable to arrange for any definite way of life or study.

Day after day he sat with his books before him, in despair, because he could not force his mind to concentrate upon any one thing. He was twenty-six years of age and he had an idea that what he needed to stabilize himself was some profession or other. But what ? If he tried the law, his thoughts immediately strayed to what he might make of engineering. Once started upon engineering he began to wonder if he were not more fitted for the stage, or a literary career.

It was about this time that I first met him. He was very intelligent, very good looking, with a great deal of charm ; while, curiously enough, he was very much a gentleman in the highly specialized way in which we English take the word. I do not think he ever committed a mean or definitely unkind action in his life, and he was the very soul of generosity ; while after a time he gathered round him a great many real friends, apart from acquaintances, was able to advise other people with the greatest possible ability ; with himself alone he could do nothing, for he could never, for two days together, feel certain of what it was that he did want, and I do not believe that he was ever definitely in love.

He lived for the most part in Rome. But if anyone went to him and said, "Come to Paris" or "Come to London with me, I'm starting in half an hour"—packed his clothes or instructed his valet to do it for him, took him off then and there to the station, he would go. Indeed he loved England, and finding himself once in a remote Devonshire village, stayed on there for months and months, completely lost to his own world. When he was run to ground at the end of an especially foul winter, he gave a queerer reason than usual for deferring his departure. There was a flower called the Wind Flower which he was told would be out in a week—perhaps less—and he wanted to see it because of the name—just for that : because of the name.

But then there was always a reason, it was really grotesque. If he was going upon a journey he would put it off day after day—because So-and-So was coming to tea ; because it looked like raining ; because the landlady's cat was going to have kittens and had grown so accustomed to his company that she might miss him at such a time—or so they said that he said—adding in his odd, whimsical, rather wistful way—you remember the Vicente way : "No one ever felt like that about me before, and I'd better make the most of it"—or again because he was expecting a letter, or his clean clothes had not come back from the laundry.

At one time he was to go from Rome to Nice to meet his youngest brother—one whom he had left behind in South America and not seen since. But he was a month late in getting there, and when he did arrive his brother had already returned home. Still having once gone he stayed for four months, though it was out of the season and he was bored to tears.

Another time, having found himself at Baden, by what chance I know not, the doctor advised him to take a Turkish bath to counteract a chill. After a good deal of delay, he allowed himself to be dragged to the baths by a friend—no, he did not stay there altogether, live and die there : that is not the end of my story, though it might well have been—but once having started, he went on taking the baths regularly every day until he was so weak that he could scarcely stand : complained to everyone—and he was one of the few people to whose complaints one found oneself ready to listen, and with sympathy too—that he really could not understand

what was the matter with him : all this because each day the bath attendant would say, taking it for granted : "At the same hour to-morrow, sir."

Later on his mother came to Europe. It happened that Vicente was in London at the time, and I myself can bear witness to his excitement and joy at the prospect of the reunion with her ; indeed he had never spoken of her save with the most passionate devotion and longing.

The programme he had mapped out was that they should meet at Barcelona and tour Spain, his mother's native country, together. But the weather happened to be very stormy ; and on going to Dover to catch the boat and finding that there was no possibility of crossing that day, he returned to London, in a dreadful state, in case he should be too late to meet her. After that, however, one thing after another intervened. "It seems as though Fate were against me," that was what he said, tragically enough, though he must in his secret heart have realized that the whole trouble lay in the total incapacity of his own nature to overcome any obstacle which happened to be in his path.

A day or two passed, and then, as it was no use attempting to catch her at Barcelona, he said that he would wait until he had her address in Madrid ; while in the end they had no more than one short day together in Paris, amid a litter 'of packing, for his mother had to leave for a boat starting from Cherbourg next day.

As it happened he never saw her again—though they had made many plans during those few feverish and interrupted hours which they had together—for she died of heart failure before reaching land.

This loss, his first real sorrow, affected Vicente more deeply than one could have thought. In his effort to counteract the irresolution which was growing upon him he drove himself to mountain climbing—and that was in his blood from his father's side of the family—scaled some of the most difficult peaks in the Apennines ; then, as though to clinch this new habit of resolution, he engaged himself to a Belgian girl : spent his time for close upon six months in an effort to remember her, and finally allowed the whole thing to slip out of his life ; for though it began by his declaring : "I can hardly keep myself from writing to her all the time ; I feel that I must be in constant communication with her, that she is the

only woman in the world who can save me from myself," it very soon came to him, clapping his hand to his forehead, on occasional evenings when he was with his friends, exclaiming: "My God! What sort of a fellow am I, I've not written to her for a week," then—"a month"—then "Heaven only knows how long!"—ending with the confession, made to myself, that the devil of it all was that he did not know if he would recognize her supposing he did meet her; or ever remember that he was married supposing that they did marry.

"The truth is I'm no good for anything," he would exclaim with despair. "Let me tell you this, Lee: there's no greater tragedy for any man than to feel himself like water slipping through his own fingers."

Perhaps when you come now to what I can but call—with the meaning that the old Greek writers put into it—"The Catastrophe" of this story of Vicente, you will say: "If it had not been cut so short it would have ended like all else in his life—just petered out."

But you were not here, you did not see. I saw and I know; and with the most complete confidence I declare that it would not have ended; that Vicente's whole life and character would have remained changed as it was changed in that hour; that this was what he had, in reality, been waiting for throughout his entire life.

Why, man, it was like the rending of the Veil of the Temple. See here, now, a butterfly emerges from the state of a chrysalis, but however short its life may be it can never again go back to being a chrysalis.

The strangest part about it all was that it affected them both alike; that it seemed as though Mary Dacre had been waiting for it too—and one can but wonder what George Dacre ever had of her, her real self, I mean; though one can scarcely pity him, seeing how contented he had been, and for how long. For Mary had been married nine years and was close upon her thirtieth birthday when she met Vicente, while Vicente himself was but thirty-five years of age: "That makes me four years old when he first came to Europe—the piteous child—the darling piteous child!" she said to me later; and I know that I was the only person to whom she ever spoke of it: "My God, to think of all the years we wasted!"

It was in George Dacre's own house. He had met Vicente in Monte Carlo, taken a very great liking to him and asked him to be sure and come and stay with them the next time he was in England, saying that he wanted him to meet his wife.

Towards the end of July that same year Dacre wrote and asked me to go and spend a week or so with them in South Wales; "There's not much to offer you in the way of amusement, for the river's lower than it has been for years, but anyhow it will be cooler than stewing in London, and you can bring your writing stuff with you," he said; while at the end of the letter was a postscript: "What has become of that nice chap we met in Monte, the Italian fellow? I can't remember his name. I wish I could get hold of him for a few days, though I don't quite know what Mary would make of him. She's not always very enthusiastic about what she calls my 'queer friends,' you know."

I wondered also, for I always thought of Mary Dacre as a good sort, a real thoroughbred, but rather conventional. All the same, as Vicente happened to be staying with me in my flat at the moment, marooned in London by the dog days and his own inertia, I could but inform Dacre of the fact when I answered his letter, accepting the invitation.

Vicente was really pleased when George Dacre wrote pressing him to accompany me, for he loved the sense of ease and leisure which hangs about a great country house.

All the same he disappeared just before the time came to catch the train which we had fixed upon between us; and when I got down to Dacre Court alone, I declared myself perfectly irresponsible for him: "I don't know what on earth became of him. He was in to lunch and then he totally disappeared. He may turn up some time next winter, or he may never turn up at all," was what I said; and I remember how Mary smiled over the teacups, tolerant and a little bored and superior: "Though it would make life a trifle difficult if we were all like that," she said.

George insisted upon sending to meet the next train—though without the faintest encouragement from me—and again the next out of sheer obstinacy; though by this, to my complete amazement, Vicente actually turned up.

Mary had already gone upstairs to dress for dinner, which was at half-past eight, and we men—George and I and a young

fellow named Arbuthnot, the only other visitor in the house—were crossing the hall toward the stairs when the motor drove up, and Vicente got out.

We two ran to the top of the steps and greeted him vociferously with a fire of chaff; indeed I was never more surprised in my life than to see him at all.

"I went to have my hair cut and—well, I don't know what happened, the time slipped itself away," said the Italian in his charming voice, his smooth well cropped dark head uncovered as he shook hands. "But, anyhow, I was determined to be here. I looked up the next train myself," he added with pride, "but something arrived, and I did not catch it. Still there was another and I am happily here—though as you see me, in what I stand up in"—he indicated his faultless, pale grey tweeds—and he was always, wherever he might be, dressed from Sackville Street—"for alas, it is beyond me to say where my luggage has taken itself off to."

We did not care for that, however, we were too frightfully glad to see him—and it was queer how glad everyone always was to see Vicente, goodness knows why, for I could never find out that he ever did anything for anybody—and he was dragged into the smoking-room for a cocktail, introduced to young Arbuthnot, whom he greeted with the sort of smile which most men keep for a woman, an *à propos* remark as to having known someone of his name whom he had admired very much—this boy's uncle, as it appeared—for he had an amazing memory for things of that sort; winning Billy Arbuthnot's heart to the extent that, on our way upstairs to dress, he confided to me his opinion of my friend as a decent sort of fellow for a foreigner, quite the highest form of praise possible.

There was some talk of lending Vicente a suit of dress clothes, but it came to nothing, for he was so evidently of a different build from any of us, making Dacre look like a fine bullock and myself like a spider. And it was this not being able to change for dinner which started it—though, after all, that's nonsense, for the thing was bound to come anyhow.

We had been playing tennis and had to have baths, which made us even longer than we should have been; but, anyhow, he had the start of us.

Walking into the drawing-room at twenty to nine, with that pleasant sort of "Well, here I am!" feeling, which follows



upon a change of linen—crowing a trifle, for I knew that I had beaten George, had indeed seen him fidgeting with a collar stud as I passed the open door of his dressing-room—I realized Mary standing with her back half turned toward me, and was beginning: “I say, I’m most frightfully sorry—” meaning to apologize for being so late, for I was always a little in awe of her, when I saw, with the most extraordinary sense of amazement and shock that Vicente was holding both her hands in his own—I say was, and not “had been,” because he released them slowly and without the slightest embarrassment; while I saw her slim fingers go out and almost follow his as they dropped away.

Vicente raised his head which had been bent—I think he must have been kissing her hands—and looked at me oddly, as though he had travelled so far since he saw me last that he had difficulty in remembering who I was; then said: “Hullo, Lec,” in his usual pleasant way, not in the least as though he resented my appearance; while I was just beginning to try and pull myself back to the normal by thinking: “I suppose they’ve met somewhere before, knew each other when they were children,” when Mary turned, faced me for a moment, then moved over to one of the long open french-windows and stood there leaning against the lintel without a word.

Mary—Mary Dacre! Of course it was her, it could not have been anyone else, there indeed was her outward form. But picture to yourself a dark house, with every window suddenly and brilliantly illuminated; nay, more, imagine a body raised from the dead with the soul ten thousand times as strong as it had ever been before; a soul which has been off upon a far journey and come back fresh to its own tenancy.

I had always thought fair women a trifle insipid, and Mary was fair; but now her fairness was like a white flame, her eyes like blue fire; it seemed that her very hair, fair and wavy, was more alive than it had ever been before, for though it was growing dark outside there was light in it as though it had been illuminated from the back.

“Hullo,” I began asininely, “I didn’t know that you two had met before.”

Mary did not attempt to say anything, neither did she attempt to remove her gaze from Vicente; though he himself answered with a little low, excited, and absurdly happy laugh:

"No, no, Lee, this is the first time—this is the hour."

He put one hand and took mine and shook it. We Englishmen are not given to shaking hands in this promiscuous way, and I don't like it; very particularly I did not like it then, for he had all the air of a man who is asking for congratulations, or rather taking them for granted, and I did not see what the devil there was to congratulate anyone about—with good old George and all.

Luckily, at this moment, George himself came into the room, followed by young Arbuthnot. Later on the boy confided to me the fact that he had been down before myself; "barged" into the room, and finding the Italian and his hostess standing hand in hand, beat a hasty retreat, feeling "no end of an ass."

I don't think that George noticed anything until Vicente offered his arm to Mary and they sailed out of the room together; and then he was only amused by what he looked upon as foreigners' lack of knowledge regarding English etiquette. For it happens that I have a sort of quite considerable title, a dreadful bore in that it generally gives me the oldest and plainest woman for my partner at every dinner party.

George Arbuthnot and I went in arm in arm, laughing, at least George was laughing. He was one of the most genial souls imaginable, and during the first part of dinner he kept the ball of conversation going. Then, very slowly, it seemed to dawn upon him that there was something wrong with the party.

Mary answered when she was spoken to, but she never volunteered a single remark; while Vicente did not speak at all, just sat devouring her with his eyes; drawing her so that every moment I expected to see her rise from her place at the foot of the table—where she sat without eating anything, with her arms resting upon the carved wooden arms of her chair—and sweep round the room to him in her long, clinging, gold-and-white dress; there and then in front of the butler and his two underlings, not to speak of her husband and myself and young Arbuthnot, who seemed to have completely dropped to pieces; I could not make out why until he told me later.

It seemed that the latter part of the dinner would never end; but at last dessert was put upon the table, and three

minutes later Mary got up and left the room, like a woman walking in a dream, while almost immediately Vicente followed her.

Dacre half rose, very red in the face, his blue eyes dazed and hot-looking, his great hands pressed down upon the edge of the table. "I don't know if we hadn't better—I don't know if Mary quite fancies—" he began confusedly, and then sat down again, saying: "Oh, well, she can fight her own battles. Better have something to drink first, eh?" as though he were frightened of any appearance of distrusting his wife.

We sat for a quarter of an hour, perhaps twenty minutes, alternately gulping and smoking—what George's good wine tasted like to himself I don't know, but it was totally without any sort of flavour upon my palate.

At last we got up and went into the drawing-room, slowly, walking in a detached fashion like mutes at a funeral.

The vast drawing-room was unlighted save for the piano candles, and full of soft shadows; through the open windows came the smell of stocks and tobacco flower.

Mary was seated at the piano—a large Broadwood grand, showing like a lake of pale moonlit water in the dim room; for the light of the candles—and I counted them, eight in all—was across it, and Mary's dress and hair, and her hands upon the keys, just touching the top of Vicente's bent head; and heaven only knows why I counted the candles, or remembered, at that moment, that he had had his hair cut the same afternoon—in London too, miles and miles and centuries away, or so it seemed.

She was not really playing, but there was a soft ripple of notes beneath her fingers, while her face was raised, her lips a little parted, as though she had just been speaking, her eyes fixed upon him.

As we came in—I myself feeling like something as odious as a detective, and very angry with everything and everybody—Vicente looked up and made us all a surprising bow, for his manners, in general, were those of any Englishman—the non-bowing human—more particularly when he was speaking English.

He said something in a low voice to Mary, and turning her gaze to the keys she began to play the *Lieberstraum* of Liszt: played it through to the very end, then rose. George,

who was moving restlessly about the room, had turned on the electric light, and now Vicente blew out each of the eight candles, shaking them with one hand so that the wax should not spatter.

He did it very slowly—and there was something curiously symbolical in the action—then straightened himself up at Mary's side :

"It is a fine night and doubtless pleasant in the garden. Madame and I have several things—matters of importance—to discuss. It will not be for more than half an hour at the very most—if you will be good enough to excuse us, Monsieur."

He addressed himself to George Dacre as his host, and not for any other reason than that he was his host, I believe ; while George, good old George, simply stared, without a word : standing in the middle of the room with his head a trifle thrust forward, his arms held a little away from his side, almost like a man who has been hit in the wind. And, remembering that he had been married to Mary for nine years, had always been perfectly sure of her as a darling, but rather cold, as really nice women ought to be, is it any wonder that he was too taken aback, too completely puzzled for words, as Vicente turned to Mary and, offering her his arm, led her, or was led by her—the Lord knows which, though I believe that it was perfectly mutual—out of the window into the velvety blackness, the silence and perfumes of the night.

For a moment or so George said nothing, then stood where he was—though I realized that he was swaying, very gently, from heel to toe, as I have seen boxers do.

Then he pulled himself together, opened out a card table, got out the cards and scoring books and lit the candles : "We can't start until they've finished their palaver ; but I expect our friend will like a rubber when he comes back ; I remember that he played an uncommonly good game when we were in Monte together."

Having settled everything, very slowly and with meticulous care, he took up a newspaper ; and moving over to the piano I was starting to play when he suddenly snapped—George, whom I had never seen irritable or nervy in his life, even under fire :

"For God's sake drop that, Lee."

Needless to say I dropped it, found a book and started to

read, or rather to pretend to read ; while young Arbuthnot, muttering something to the effect that he was very tired and there was a four without him, shamelessly took himself off to bed.

George and I kept glancing at the clock ; both of us, to judge by my own feelings and George's face, in terror of being caught one by the other.

We were not kept waiting long, however, for in something less than twenty-five minutes there was a sound of steps upon the veranda, and Mary Dacre and Vicente came into the room.

George and I both rose, with an odd effect of standing at attention. I think that until that moment we had both been determined to take their behaviour as nothing more than a little odd, and so finish the game—anyhow for that night—with bridge.

Directly we saw them we realized that all pretence was at an end. And it was not only the look of them, but the sort of atmosphere which they brought with them into the room. Of guilt ? No, no, nothing of that sort—for don't imagine for one moment that they had been—how can I put it in English ?—well, as we say 'up to anything' ; if they had been that sort the affair might have ended there—rather something intense and exalted, something so live that it was like life itself.

They held each other's hands. Mary's face was very white, but even then I realized that it was from an intensity of feeling, and not from fear. Selfish ? Of course she was selfish—entirely selfish, perhaps for the first time in her life—for I don't believe that she ever even thought of what her husband might be feeling. But then, all really big things take you like that ; anyhow the one hour does, so it's no use pretending otherwise.

I was half out of the room when George called me : "If you don't mind, Lee, I'd rather you stayed," he said, and I moved back to his side.

In the course of his fidgeting he had turned out the lights once more, complaining of the glare, and we faced each other over the bridge table with its candles.

Vicente began : "I have something that I must tell you," and George said, "Go ahead," rather gruffly ; but otherwise with no sort of feeling in his voice.

"Your wife and I love each other. We realized that the very first moment we met : there is no help for it, there can be no help for it, we belong to each other. She was here in the drawing-room when I came down before—early, for remember that I was not able to dress. There was nothing planned, we knew nothing of each other ; I ask you to believe that, Monsieur."

"All right—go on."

"She was standing looking out of the window when I moved forward, thinking to make my apologies, for being so late, for my appearance. But the moment she turned toward me I knew and she knew. It was what we had been waiting for all our lives. you must realize that. It was certain—certain as death," he added solemnly.

"Is this true, Mary ?" My host's usually ruddy face was almost grey, his voice thick as though he were speaking through a blanket.

"Yes." She looked at him with that curious blue flame still in her eyes ; hesitated for a moment, and then, realizing I suppose, something of what he was suffering—though nothing on earth could have changed her—added in a low voice : "I am sorry."

"We were talking it—what do you say ?—talking it over when you came in after dinner, and again in the garden," went on Vicente. "Something had to be decided ; there could not be— You must see, you must understand that there could not be another night, Monsieur," he added, so significantly that I realized what he meant. Mary could not spend the night with her husband—and they were an old-fashioned couple who had always shared the same room—neither could he spend the night under the roof of a man whose wife he had, very literally, though inevitably, taken away from him.

"Madame will go upstairs now and get together a few things—as few as possible. It is the only way—believe me that it is the only way."

George Dacre sat down rather heavily, bent forward across the bridge table as though he were in pain ; and taking up the cards, began to slide them slowly and mechanically through his fingers. Then, raising his eyes, but not his head, he looked at his wife.

"You have agreed to this, Mary ?" he asked ; and then, as she bowed her head, went on :

"We have lived together for nine years. I don't think that you have been unhappy; I think that—thick-headed as I am—I would have known if you were unhappy. As for myself I know I—that I—" for a moment his voice broke, then he pulled himself together again: "I don't believe that any man could have been happier, more—more deeply grateful."

"I know," said Mary, "oh, I know." She was moved now, one could say that; but all the same she did not loose Vicente's hand, and there was—somehow or other I could see that—no sort of wavering in her.

"And yet, after all these years, you could walk out of my house with a perfect stranger, a man whom you never met until this evening, who is not even of your own race—a man of whom you know nothing whatever."

"Nothing makes, could make, any difference."

"This has been your home for all these years—I have been your husband, we have had—" he hesitated a moment as though at a loss for words, "we have had everything in common. There was the little chap, and the way we were so frightfully cut up," he added clumsily; for they had lost their only child, the heir to all this beautiful estate, when he was less than three years old, had been broken-hearted over it; indeed, I never in all my life saw a man so cut up as old George.

"I know—I'm sorry," she repeated, "but nothing could ever make any difference—nothing—nothing, past or to come. Oh, George," she moved a step forward, looking at him, her eyes for the first time full of tears, "don't you see that it is all wiped out—that I can never be the same again? If I had a whole family of children it would make no difference; if he was a beggar I'd follow him along the road; if he was a criminal in prison I'd wait for him, and all of myself would be with him. If I seemed to stay here with you there would be nothing of me really—an empty shell and nothing more."

"I don't want to say anything against him," said George heavily; "you understand that, Vicente, I don't want to come down to that sort of thing," he glanced for a moment at Vicente, who bowed; "but look here, Mary, you may go away with him and he may grow tired of you, leave you for another woman. I hate to say this," he added apologetically, very great gentleman that he was, for all he looked like a farmer, "but you know what the world is, Mary."

"Yes, I know, but I can't help it. I didn't mean to deceive

you, defraud you, indeed I didn't, you must believe that—but I didn't know—I didn't know. I could not have believed that it was like this. There is no more of myself any longer. See here, now," she drew her hand away from Vicente's, "if I take my hand away from his now it is a sort of pain—a shuddering ache drawing me as though I were on the rack. George, you must let me go away with him you must—" Suddenly all her calm went as though she were afraid that she might be kept there by force.—"Look here now—if we were both alive and apart my flesh would be torn off my bones, my heart and soul torn out of me so that I bled for him without ceasing. You couldn't keep me, couldn't—there'd be nothing of me to keep—we can't help it, it's not our fault, but there it is, there is nothing to be done," she added almost sullenly.

And all this from Mary—Mary Dacre, in general more English and articulate and reserved than any woman whom I have ever known.

"I see," said George, and getting up slowly and heavily like an old man, with both hands pressed down upon the table, he walked over to the door :

"If you will get your things together I'll order round the motor in half an hour. I think that will give you time—the train does not leave until twenty past eleven," he added, and so stood holding the door open while his wife passed out of it. Then, returning to the table, he sat down once more in the same place, leaning his chin upon one hand, turning the cards over with the other.

Vicente too drew up a seat and sat opposite to him, but a little sideways, while I walked over to one of the windows and stood there, with the scent of stock and tobacco flowers—which I shall never forget, shall always hate—in my nostrils.

"God damn your soul !" said George suddenly and loudly ; upon which Vicente—and I could see his slim, beautifully made lithe figure, the outline of his face, with the small, true Roman nose like a silhouette cut out against the light of the candles—drew a quick breath of relief.

"I am glad to hear you say that," he said, "I know myself what it must seem like ; and I'd give almost anything in life not to have come here to-night, to have missed that last train which something forced me into catching. And yet, for all



that, I know that if I had not come I should never have lived at all—that up to now I never have lived at all, unless it were in a sort of dream in which nothing and nobody was ever quite real.”

George dropped his other hand from his chin and began shuffling out the cards. “You know I can’t let it go on,” he said rather unexpectedly, for I had had a sort of feeling—and did not fancy it, either—that he was just going to let things take their course. “I suppose that we might decide it by the cards—but after all that would do no good, we should still be alive, the two of us ; and that’s the bother of it all.”

“No, no, that would do no good whatever,” agreed Vicente. “I had thought of that, too.”

Taking his cigarette-case from his pocket he lit a cigarette, while I could see by the outline of his face that it was set grave and anxious ; indeed there seemed more of grave concern than anger in both men.

“You must understand, Monsieur, that Madame thought, as we could not live apart—and God knows how right she was there—that the way in which we arranged it was possible. But I see now differently. For a man it is not to be thought of, is out of the question—that way.”

“I am glad that you see that,” said George, rather humbly ; “and of course there’s another way, too. I might blow out my own brains—I thought of that when she was speaking. All the same I can’t do it. Oh, damn it all, I don’t see why I should do it,” he rose from his seat as he spoke, “sneaking out by the back way, throwing up the sponge in that fashion.”

“I understand perfectly.” Vicente, who had also risen as though they were both jerked up by one string—and it was odd how I felt that they really liked each other—flicked the ash from his cigarette with one finger.

“There is another way, you know,” he added hesitatingly ; “I don’t know if you would like it, but in my country it would be—still is—the only way.”

“You mean . . . ?”

“Rapiers are out of the question, of course ; even if you had them I imagine that we should be helpless with them. It is ridiculous,” the Italian shrugged his shoulders, “that we should not have outgrown our passions with the tools which were fashioned to serve their ends—but there you are.”

“I said in half an hour,” George Dacre glanced at the

clock—"ten minutes has already passed. It seems a confoundedly theatrical and stupid sort of way of settling things. But I believe that you people are right and that it is the only way."

He moved toward the door; then turned in the doorway:

"There is only Lord Lee here," he said, "perhaps you would like somebody—ought to have somebody."

"No, no," answered Vicente, who had turned a little, following George with his eyes so that the candle-light was full upon his face, and I could see his odd, half-apologetic smile. "After all, we are all friends, you know."

As our host nodded gravely and left the room, I broke out: "Look here, Vicente, what the devil are you up to? Are you stark staring mad? Mrs. Dacre is not in the very least your sort, and you've met her for the first time this evening. If you go away now you'll have forgotten all about her in a week. For goodness' sake drop it!"

"That is beyond me; the whole thing is beyond me, beyond either of us. All my life I have dreamed—and now this is life. I could no more stop it than I could stop having been born."

"But, look here, people don't do things like that in these days. They just—well, they just bite upon a thing of this sort; take themselves off decently, quietly, and say nothing about it. Why, man alive, we've all got to do our own lying awake at night. But as to fighting over a woman, blowing each other's brains out, the thing's grotesque."

"I know it seems like that—it is all of a piece. We imagine that we've outgrown our toys and shut them away in a cupboard. But we have not outgrown them—and thank God for that," he added with a sudden passion—out of that calm which seemed so odd in a foreigner. "All that we have ever outgrown is the heart to play with them, all that we ever need is the incentive or the comrade to play with. And I've found it now," he added, "if I die to-night I've found it—the divine plaything and the playmate."

"But how can you tell—how can she tell? You know nothing of each other."

"Look here, Lord Lee," Vicente turned toward me and laid one hand upon my arm. "There are two catch phrases, 'consummation'—is not that the word?—and what you English call living in sin. Our marriage was consummated the very first moment I ever set eyes upon her, and by something

which lies far deeper and more lasting than vows. If I never saw her again, if I never touched her hand again, and I have never yet touched her lips, she could never belong to another man so long as I lived; while to live with her own husband—why there, indeed, would be the living in sin. That is what we spoke of in the garden. If I——”

He broke off at the sound of George Dacre's voice in the doorway speaking to a servant, telling him to order the motor to be round in a quarter of an hour.

“For one or the other of us,” he explained as he entered the room; then added, looking more directly at Vicente: “Of course it is understood that I should not stay.”

He had a small mahogany case in his hand.

“I don't know if you are used to these things,” he said, “but you can't be more unused to them than I am. They are a pair of French duelling pistols which were given to me during the war by the widow of a French officer I knew. I don't believe that they have ever been out of their case.”

“That's all right. They are loaded?”

“They are, but if you like——”

“No, no, we know each other. And now as time is getting short——”

“There is a little garden for growing herbs and that sort of thing, and quite clear of trees,” said George, in the same heavy way in which he had spoken before; and then adding: “We shall get all the moonlight there is there, and anything is better than being penned up in the house—besides, she would hear the shots——” He moved out of the window, followed by Vicente and myself, across the terrace, down a shallow flight of steps, over a lawn blackened by the shadows of the cedars, and through a small gate set in a clipped horn-beam hedge, into the garden of which he had spoken.

There was one wide gravel path down the centre, white in the moonlight, and I paced out fifteen yards upon that. It was all utterly irregular, but we were dead tired and sad for each other and without any sort of animosity.

For all that there was no pretence, no firing into the air or anything of that sort, or why should we have been there at all?

I think that both men fired absolutely at once. I did not even know what one ought to say or do, and remembering the word used when we ran races in our childhood, George and I, I had told them “When I say ‘Off’!”

As Vicente fell sideways into a bed of mint, we both ran toward him, knelt at his side—and my God! how dreadfully well I remember the smell of the sweet, damp earth, the pungent crushed herbs.

The grey waistcoat of his beautiful pale grey suit had a small, dark stain upon it which spread and spread. As George opened it, while I held him a little raised in my arms, we could see that his shirt was sopped with blood.

I heard old George murmur “Good God!” and saw that odd, whimsical, wistful and wholly loveable smile which we knew so well flicker for one moment over Vicente’s face, while he murmured, and I could just catch it as I bent lower over him, the words: “All right, old chap,” in that exaggerated colloquial English which it gave him, at times, such pleasure to use.

“Look here, would you like to see her?—I’ll fetch her,” broke out George suddenly; but Vicente shook his head.

“No, no—if you could leave me like this—with this in my hand—and go back to the house and make a pretence to look for me when the motor comes round to the door—it might—” he spoke brokenly—for he was far gone and there was blood round his lips—and then added: “Ah, Lee!” and then quickly: “For heaven’s sake wipe my face, Lee,” upon which I glanced up and saw Mary Dacre coming quickly down the garden in a dark dress as though she were made ready for a journey.

She knelt down at Vicente’s side, and George, moving him with infinite caution, laid him so that he had his head against her breast.

She uttered no word of reproach—and I had not guessed that she was as big as that—but took her lover in her arms and leant over him, murmuring something which seemed to me to be without words, as a mother murmurs over a hurt child; while strangely enough there seemed no sort of bitterness or animosity anywhere in any one of us—and, indeed, there never had been and never was to be.

After a moment or so I heard him say: “The little hour—the golden hour, dear heart,” but that was all, for after this, seeing by the grey look upon Mary’s face, the way in which her shoulders sagged down, that he was a dead weight in her arms, George knelt by her side, took him very gently from her and laid him back among the herbs.



SIR PHILIP GIBBS  
*Aunt Kate and Queen Victoria*

Sir Philip Gibbs has had varied experiences as journalist and war-correspondent of the staffs of famous newspapers. He has also found time to write a large number of novels and short stories—*The Street of Adventure* and *The Cross of Peace* are perhaps the best known—and a great many historical books and essays.



## AUNT KATE AND QUEEN VICTORIA

AUNT KATE is dead now—with other women who were lovely in her time—but the other day when I went to Windsor Castle, among a group of American tourists who were being shown over the State Apartments, I thought of her, not, as I remembered her in her old age, rather sharp-tongued and a little querulous, now and then, but as she must have been as a young girl, before I was born, when she had her love affair, here at the Castle, while she was in attendance on the Queen. . . . She told me the story—with little variations—so often when I was a boy that I could correct her if she left out certain details which I found rather thrilling.

“Tell me how you felt when John Brown found you in the forest with the young officer.”

“Terrified, my dear! I nearly swooned in William’s arms. You have no idea how frightened we all were of John Brown, who was nothing but a servant—an ignorant Scotsman fond of his whisky—but very rude and tyrannical with everyone. He used to speak in the bluntest way even to the Queen, and perhaps that is why she trusted him so much. Of course I knew he would tell tales about me—the wretch!”

“Well, I must say you were rather daring for a Victorian young person!”

So I used to say at this stage of the story, liking to see the laughter in her eyes, and to hear her defence.

“Oh, we weren’t such timid mice as people make out nowadays. Youth is the same in all ages, I think. . . . And love makes one very rash, my dear. You’ll find out one day.”

Love made Aunt Kate very rash for a young girl—nineteen then—who lived in Windsor Castle at a time when the Queen’s widowhood, and her very severe principles of propriety and etiquette, and the awe which her presence inspired in all her subjects, made her Court rather less cheerful



than it might have been for those in personal attendance on her. But before Aunt Kate was made rash by love, she suffered agonies of timidity and fright in the presence of the Queen's estimable ladies—some of them very charming and tender, no doubt—who were shocked sometimes by her gaiety and lack of decorum, which made her forget now and then the demureness which was expected of young girls. There was a dreadful scene one day when she giggled in the presence of Majesty. It was ever such a little giggle, suppressed in a lace handkerchief, but it caught the ear of the Queen, who looked startled and desired to know the cause of this mirth.

"If you please, ma'am," said Aunt Kate, dropping a deep curtsey, and wishing the floor might open and swallow her up, "one of my buttons has fallen off."

It was the little white button of an undergarment which lay there, on the polished boards, looking most ridiculous and very lonely. She had felt it go before it slipped beneath her petticoat and made that giggle irresistible to a young woman with a sense of humour.

There was a terrible silence among the ladies-in-waiting which seemed to last for an hour, but was perhaps no more than a second, before the Queen spoke.

"Not a very nice joke," said the Queen. "If any gentleman had been present it would have been *most* immodest. You had better go to your own room, Kate."

Aunt Kate dropped another curtsey, in one of those hooped dresses of sprigged muslin which billowed about the ladies of that time. It was always difficult to walk backwards out of the presence of the Queen, but that day it was a dreadful ordeal after this severe rebuke, when she was conscious of the royal displeasure reflected upon the faces of the ladies-in-waiting. What made it worse was that horrible little button which she had to leave behind her as a visible symbol of disgrace.

Up in her bedroom in the Round Tower, which looked over the turrets and red roofs, and battlemented walls of the old Castle, and away to the massed foliage of Windsor Great Forest, she wept bitterly on her bed with a pillow stuffed in her mouth. To be reproached by the Queen in the presence of her ladies was the most terrible thing that could happen to anyone—worse than death, as it seemed to Aunt Kate. . . . Not quite so bad as that, really, because life had compensations

for a pretty maid to whom everybody was kind, so that even the sentries smiled under their heavy bushies when she passed them beneath the gates, and the Military Knights of Windsor—old gentlemen pensioned after serving Queen and country in many little wars that are now forgotten—stared after her with a kind of tender wistfulness, as though remembering love and youth, and the servants of the Royal Household went out of their way to be helpful and friendly, which was not their custom with some of the ladies of high rank, who hardly treated them as human beings.

"Beauty is a great gift," said Aunt Kate, years afterwards when she was an old woman. "I was a pretty creature in those days, my dear, though you wouldn't think so now. Men liked the look of me, and I was glad to know it."

Beneath their demureness and their modesty, those Victorian young women knew the meaning of sex appeal, though such words would have shocked them profoundly.

Amongst the men who liked the look of her was the Very Reverend Archibald Langport, canon residentiary of Windsor, who lived in the Horseshoe Cloisters before he became a bishop, owing to the Queen's admiration of his sermons, which Aunt Kate thought very dull and tedious, and her high opinion of his spiritual worth. He was at that time a man of about forty-eight, which was nearly thirty years older than Aunt Kate, so that she looked upon him as quite an old gentleman, or at least elderly, and was not alarmed by any secret timidity when he stopped to talk to her if she met him on the terrace, and even whispered to her, and smiled, and made little jokes in St. George's Chapel between the services, when sometimes she slipped into that place of beauty to say a little prayer—rather vague and sentimental, no doubt—or to escape from one of the old ladies with their sharp eyes for any "girlish nonsense," as they were pleased to call her high spirits. She never imagined that the Very Reverend Archibald Langport, this tall, stout, pleasant-looking gentleman, in clerical clothes and black silk stockings which seemed to set him apart from worldly men of the ordinary human kind, should have fallen in love with one of the Queen's maids who was nothing but the daughter of a Queen's messenger—a respectable but not exalted office—when he might have chosen a lady of high rank (they all adored him) more suitable to his dignity and age.

"It never entered my head," said Aunt Kate. "Even now it seems too ridiculous."

Doubtless Canon Langport had an eye for beauty, which, in some minds, is above all considerations of rank. It seems to me likely that Aunt Kate in her young girlhood was a refreshing contrast to some of the elderly dames who surrounded the Queen, and that her youth, her gaiety, the roselike freshness of her maidenhood, her habit of rippling into a quick laughter at any little joke, was alluring to the soul of a canon who had remained a bachelor until forty-eight, and lived in the atmosphere of Windsor Castle where the Queen's widowhood and the spirit of the age and all the heavy etiquette of the Court was rather blighting in its influence.

He asked her to tea many times in the Horseshoe Cloisters, where his mother worked away at an interminable piece of tapestry, while he showed Aunt Kate engravings he had brought back from Italy and other wonderful places, or told amusing stories of his life as an undergraduate of Oxford.

Rather daring stories they seemed at that time. Stories of being "sconced" for quoting Latin tags in hall, stories of "raggings" and other adventures of youth, which caused Mrs. Langport to rebuke her son nervously.

"My dear Archibald! Do you think it is quite right to tell such tales to a young lady? Is it quite dignified?"

"Youth will be youth," said the canon breezily. "Miss Kate doesn't want me to preach sermons to her over the tea-table. She has quite enough of them on Sunday."

That was true, though Aunt Kate, being a well-mannered young woman, denied that she was ever tired of his sermons.

"A white lie, my dear," she told me. "We were taught to be polite in those days. Sometimes this modern truth-telling is nothing but rudeness."

That afternoon, she remembered, he squeezed her hand rather hard when he strolled back with her to the Lower Ward before going to Evensong in the chapel. She was conscious of this tender pressure of his hand, but even then did not suspect any amorous feeling on the part of a man more than old enough to be her father.

"How kind he is!" she thought. "How good everyone is to me! How ungrateful I am to find life so dull here."

On the very next afternoon she went to tea with him again in answer to a note he sent up by one of the choirboys of

St. George's Chapel. He said he had something of "particular importance" to tell her, and would be extremely obliged if she would favour him by taking tea at the usual hour of four o'clock.

Even then she did not guess what that thing of "particular importance" might be. Her conscience pricked her. She thought perhaps that some of her naughtiness might have been reported to him by one of the old ladies, and that he had been deputed to lecture her on moral sensibilities and the decorum of young gentlewomen.

Only the night before she had got into trouble with the Mistress of the Robes—"that old wretch!" said Aunt Kate—for a pillow fight with two of the maids of honour. They had been caught in their nightgowns and in the midst of a scrimmage in which Aunt Kate was getting all the best of it, as she afterwards boasted. Then the Mistress of the Robes had appeared with her hair in curl papers—"a perfect fright," said my aunt—looking like Cassandra or some tragic lady of antiquity.

"Disgraceful!" she said, in a sepulchral voice. "Where is your modesty, young ladies? How dare you behave so, with such a shocking lack of decency and respect? It will be my duty to tell the Queen."

At this dreadful threat, Lady Margery, one of the maids of honour, burst into tears, sobbing and weeping noisily, and imploring "the old wretch" not to tell the Queen, for mercy's sake. Perhaps she was not such an old wretch as they thought. Her memoirs reveal a charming and humorous mind. Anyhow she did not tell the Queen, but Aunt Kate suspected that she might have told the Very Reverend Archibald Langport, with instructions for a solemn talk.

She remembered that afternoon as an eventful date in her life. It was a sultry day in July, and the sun lay on the Castle slopes, flinging deep shadows from the walls. In the Castle itself there was an atmosphere of oppression and nervousness. Her Majesty was not in a good humour, and as usual the knowledge of this seemed to permeate the household. John Brown was rude to Lady Ely, and to everyone else who came in contact with him. He had bullied one of the junior footmen, who had lost his temper and told him to "mind his blooming business." Even the Queen's Indian orderlies who looked like princes seemed more stealthy in their movements and more profoundly sad than usual.

There was a coming and going of visitors who were received in audience. Among them was Colonel Roberts, a dapper little soldier, who had just come back from the fighting in Abyssinia in that year 1868. He passed down the long gallery with a clink of spurs, and came back with shining eyes, like a knight received by his lady. Then Mr. Gladstone came. Perhaps that was the cause of the Queen's ill-humour. She could not forgive him for defeating "dear Dizzy." "That dreadful man!" whispered the Mistress of the Robes after Mr. Gladstone had passed into the Queen's chamber with an air of self-righteous dignity as though not even Queen Victoria could daunt his sense of political rectitude. The whole Court regarded him as a terrible radical who was trying to overthrow the constitution by pandering to democracy—that advancing dragon. The Queen was always fretful when he came down to Windsor.

But perhaps it was the Prince who was the cause of her immediate touch of irritability that July afternoon. Aunt Kate has told me some tale about the Prince of Wales at this time which now escapes my memory. It has something to do with a pretty lady and horse-racing—two subjects which leave a wide field for scandal. Anyhow, it is certain that H.R.H., as they called him, was not feeling happy in his mind over this visit to his august mother. Aunt Kate happened to be in one of the corridors when he stood outside the Queen's door waiting for Mr. Gladstone to come out. He was mopping his forehead, and looked for all the world, she said, like a school-boy waiting for an interview with the headmaster, though he must have been nearly thirty years of age.

She dropped him a curtsey and he smiled at her in a friendly way.

"Hullo, Kate! I wish I felt as cool and fresh as you look to-day."

"It is rather warm, sir," said Kate demurely.

"Devilish!" said H.R.H. "And it's going to be warmer."

He nodded towards the Queen's room and then laughed and whispered:

"I'm in for a wiggng, Kate! . . . The Prodigal Son . . . Oh, lord!"

She checked a ripple of laughter. It seemed absurd that this grown-up man, who was the Prince of Wales, should be as much afraid of the Queen as any one of her subjects. The

Prince put his finger to his lips with a smile, and then said good afternoon to Mr. Gladstone who came out with the same look of solemn importance.

"It was the twenty-first of July," said Aunt Kate. "I remember every incident as though it were yesterday. It was when Canon Langport 'popped the question,' as we used to say."

In her old age she laughed at that episode, but at the time it seemed to her amazing and overwhelming. At the tea-table he had shirked answering her question about the subject of particular importance, but when his mother made an excuse to leave the room to fetch her precious tapestry, he pushed away his teacup and stood up with his back to the fireplace—"very handsome and impressive," said my aunt—and looked down upon her as she ate a cream tartlet from the Queen's confectioner.

"My dear Miss Kate," said the canon rather solemnly, "I am about to make a proposal to you which may perhaps startle your girlish sensibilities. Of course, you are very young, and I am no longer so young as I should like to be—though still in early middle age. . . ."

(Aunt Kate used to imitate this speech with admirable mimicry.)

"But you may see advantages in a state of life which is perhaps above that of your own family and prospects, and at the same time, would give you an assured affection—a very tender solicitude for your happiness, my dear. . . . To come briefly to the point, I should be a very happy man if you would consent to be my wife. I love you, my little Kate—your beauty, your charm, your tender modesty. . . ."

He crossed over to her and knelt down on one knee and kissed her left hand. He would probably have kissed her right hand if she had not still clutched that cream tart—half-eaten—so tightly that the cream oozed out upon her fingers.

Aunt Kate was more astonished than she had ever been in her life before. She was also frightened. Waves of hot colour rushed into her cheeks and then left her white. She was terribly embarrassed, partly because of that cream on her finger-tips. Even in that moment of supreme importance to her life, the little imp of ridicule in her mind made her see how ridiculous it was to be clutching that messy tart while a portly and reverend gentleman knelt on one knee before her,

asking her this stupendous question. Furtively she wiped the tips of her fingers on her handkerchief. Somehow she managed to stammer out a few shy words.

"Oh, sir! . . . Oh, Mr. Langport! . . . It is a very great honour, I am sure. . . . It is so very kind of you!"

She felt quite sincerely then, she told me, that it was indeed a great honour and that he was very kind. She did not love him in the least, of course. But it was impossible, she felt, to be rude to him. It was equally impossible to refuse him. A girl of her age—a little chit of a thing, as she called herself—was utterly overwhelmed by the reverence she felt for this superb man who condescended to admire her. . . . Besides, there were other great powers which forced her consent, as she heard with new consternation.

"The Queen," said Canon Langport, "has been graciously pleased to approve of our marriage. I have also spoken to your respected father, who is, I believe, pleased and proud."

The Queen's approval was as good as a command. What the Queen approved had to be done—except by Mr. Gladstone. There was no way of escape for Aunt Kate, it seemed. Indeed, she did not want to escape at that moment. A rabbit does not want to escape from the snake before which it trembles. It is just fascinated and powerless, as though caught in the coils. Not that Canon Langport had any reptilian characteristics. On the contrary, he was kind and tender and alarmingly human. Alarming when he abandoned his kneeling position and quite suddenly kissed Aunt Kate on the neck below her right ear.

"My dear!" he exclaimed. "My sweet little Kate! How wonderful to think that I shall have you as my very own wife! The pretty witch of Windsor! The loveliest rose in England!"

She found her head somehow pressed against his silk waistcoat, and it was then that she burst into tears, not of unhappiness, but of sheer emotion, and was so discovered by Mrs. Langport, who returned with her tapestry and said "Well, Archibald?" in a sharp tone.

That afternoon, between tea and dinner, before Kate had time to realize the amazing thing that had befallen her, or to protest against it, even if she had had the will to do so, Canon Langport announced his glad tidings to two of the ladies-in-waiting (after Evensong) and whispered his secret to Lady Ely who was in attendance on the Queen. Such sentimental

news, as all other gossip, travelled fast in the Royal Household, and by lunch-time the next day, Aunt Kate was receiving congratulations, smiling glances, arched eyebrows, nods and becks from great dames and young gentlewomen who previously had not taken much notice of this "little chit." Even some of the royal servants said, "Hearty congratulations, Miss Kate!" very respectfully and affectionately. The engagement received an almost royal *cachet* when John Brown himself stopped Aunt Kate on his way to walk beside the Queen's pony-carriage when she took her airing, and smiled at her in his dour way under sandy eyebrows while Aunt Kate blushed and stared at the bony knees under his kilt.

"They tell me you're going to marry Canon Langport, Missy, and I'm verra glad to hear the news. I have a high respect for him as a God-fearing man, though I dinna see eye to eye with him always on theology. He's a brave man to marry a wee bit lassie like yourself, with a natural propensity to light behaviours, being so young and winsome, but I dare say he'll put the fear of the Lord into your heart, and you have my good wishes for a respectable married life. I'll slip a word into the Queen's ear about it."

"Thank you, Mr. Brown," said Aunt Kate, but in her heart she wished him in boiling oil because of his air of authority and condescension. He was nothing but a Scotch gilly, but owing to the Queen's trust in him, the whole household went in fear of his watchful eyes and blunt speech.

He must have "slipped that word" into the Queen's ear, for on the following afternoon, one of the maids of honour came running into Aunt Kate's room and seized her by the wrist with laughing urgency.

"The Queen wants you! . . . Quick, Kate! . . . Like the wind!"

Aunt Kate took one fevered glance in her mirror to see that her hair was tidy, and blinked away some silly tears that had been in her eyes before Lady Margery came in like a gust. For some reason she was feeling miserable about this engagement to a Very Reverend gentleman. She would never be able to live up to his moral standard. And he was old enough to be her father. And she couldn't bear his silk waistcoat and stockings. And she was caught in a trap like a white mouse.

"There's a tape showing under your bodice, my dear,"



said Lady Margery. "The Queen will be dreadfully shocked if she sees it."

That shocking bit of tape was tucked in hurriedly. Aunt Kate's white frock was smoothed down. She was hurried along the corridors by the young lady who was a messenger of Majesty. Her heart beat like a sledge-hammer against her stays, as it always did when she approached the little lady who ruled the Empire.

The Queen was listening to the reading of a leading article in *The Times* by Lady Ely who sat on a low stool by Her Majesty's chair. No notice was taken of Aunt Kate, who dropped a deep curtsey at the door and advanced three steps and curtsyed again.

"A most dreadful and violent article," said the Queen sharply. "The liberty of the Press exceeds *all* bounds of decency and respect! Kindly read that last paragraph again."

Lady Ely read the last paragraph again, in a voice of horror, though Aunt Kate was never able to tell me what abominable sentiments were expressed in *The Times* of that date in the year 1868. She was not listening. She was wondering whether the Queen could hear the sledge-hammer beat of her heart against her stays. Once she ventured to glance timidly at that little black figure sitting in a straight-backed chair, with one hand supporting her chin. She wore her widow's cap edged with white and a black silk gown. A middle-aged matron, growing plump, and plainly dressed, but invested with a dignity, a command, a consciousness of greatness which overwhelmed everyone who came into her presence—even the highest and noblest in the land.

Presently, after an hour, as it seemed, though perhaps it was only five minutes, the Queen looked at Aunt Kate and beckoned her with a smile.

"Come here, child."

Aunt Kate dropped another curtsey and then stood with her hands clasped before the Queen.

"So you have become engaged to Canon Langport, Kate? That is a great honour for you. You must pray to be worthy of such a good and estimable man."

"Yes, ma'am," said Aunt Kate in a timid little voice.

The Queen smiled at her.

"Such a child! . . . But early marriages are always best. . . . Tell the dear Canon that the Queen is delighted with his

choice and will be pleased to attend your wedding. . . . In St. George's Chapel, of course."

"Oh, ma'am!"

Aunt Kate whispered the words and fell into the billowing wave of her white frock again.

"You can go, Kate."

Before Aunt Kate left the room backwards, very weak in the legs—not spoken of in those days or even recognized as part of the female body—Lady Ely had resumed the reading of the dreadful article in *The Times*.

She was trapped like a white mouse. The Queen was going to attend her wedding in St. George's Chapel. She would belong for ever and ever to the Very Reverend Archibald Langport. She would never be able to laugh, or giggle, or have pillow fights, or read naughty novels in bed, or dream of the adorable young man whom she knew to be waiting for her somewhere in the wide and wonderful world. . . . Poor Aunt Kate!

It was a mockery of fate that the adorable young man whom she had been expecting in her day-dreams should appear when she was making the wedding-dress in which she was to be married to an elderly cleric.

He was William Anson, a lieutenant of the Grenadier Guards, on garrison duty at the Castle—a young man with extraordinarily beautiful whiskers which had the glint of gold in them, and light-grey eyes with a most boyish and charming smile, and fair skin which was quick to blush when his heart beneath a padded tunic beat at the sight of Aunt Kate.

The Grenadier Guards had relieved the Scots Guards only a week or two after Aunt Kate's engagement, and the first time she saw William was when he came to tea one day with Canon Langport, who happened to be his uncle. She knew instantly that he was the lover of her dreams, and she went quite white for a moment, and almost swooned. So she told me thirty years afterwards, though I accused her of having her stays too tightly laced.

"He looked adorable," she said, "in his red tunic, carrying a great busby on his left arm while his hand was supported on his sword hilt before he took off this weapon and put it up against the mantelpiece—just as it if were a toasting-fork!"

Their eyes met for a moment, until her eyelashes fluttered and drooped before that look of smiling admiration. She had

just time to see the blush creep into his fair skin, and the glint of gold in those wonderful whiskers of his, and the look which told her that he knew his fate had come, as she knew instantly.

"My nephew, William Anson," said the canon breezily. "We shall have the advantage of his company a good deal, I hope, now that the Grenadiers are stationed at Windsor again. . . . You will pour out tea, my dear? Mother won't mind, I am sure, and I like to see you presiding over the teacups. Before long . . ."

He laughed and patted one of her hands.

It was very difficult for Aunt Kate to pour out tea, owing to her state of agitation in the presence of that young officer. Her hands trembled and she spilled some of the tea on her white frock, and was terribly embarrassed when William Anson said, "Oh, I say! . . . Allow me! . . . I beg of you! . . ." and went down on his knee very gracefully, in spite of his tight trousers, and dabbed her frock with a handkerchief which he had pulled out miraculously from the left sleeve of his tunic.

"It is nothing," said Aunt Kate. "Please do not trouble yourself in the least, sir."

Their hands touched for a second, and it was as though some electric shock startled them both; a rush of the vital spark between two highly-charged bodies. She was sure that he had felt it as well, because he looked quite pale suddenly, as he rose from his knees.

"It's that teapot," said Canon Langport, laughing heartily. "There must be something wrong with the spout. Mother did the same thing yesterday. That pretty frock of yours, my Kate! What a shame!"

Later he led and held the conversation about his Italian travels. It was only necessary for Aunt Kate to smile at the right place and for Lieutenant Anson to say, "Really! . . . By Jove, now! . . . By Gad, sir, you don't say so!"

Once or twice Aunt Kate met his eyes again, fixed upon her with a kind of adoration, and she tried to hide the secret in her own eyes, this terrible secret of sudden love which had come to torture her heart because she was engaged to an elderly gentleman and shortly to be married to him in the Queen's presence.

Fate, which weaves its artful web for human hearts, worked in such a way that Aunt Kate had several meetings with

Lieutenant Anson during the next few days. They came face to face in the Lower Ward when he had come from changing guard, and it was natural that he should walk with her a little way, bending slightly when she spoke to him, and seeming like a young giant beside her because of his own six feet and his tall busby, compared with her five-foot-four and her little coal-scuttle bonnet.

She spoke lightly and merrily, hiding her agitation.

"Don't you find it dull, Mr. Anson, in this dreary old Castle?"

"Oh, no, Miss Kate," he answered shyly. "Not at all, by Jove! It's very romantic and all that, don't you think?"

"Surely you prefer London!" she exclaimed. "There are so many pretty ladies there, and I am sure they make a great fuss of any young officer in the Grenadier Guards."

He blushed deeply and fingered his golden whiskers nervously.

"You are teasing me, I am afraid," he protested. "Upon my honour, I am not much interested in the pretty ladies of London."

"Oh, what hardness of heart, Mr. Anson!"

She was teasing him, she told me, but it seems to me obvious that she was also flirting with him, dangerously for herself and him, considering her engagement to the Very Reverend Archibald Langport who happened to be his uncle. She denied all that in later years, but she admits that she called out to him from her window in the Round Tower when he passed one evening after dinner. She left her wedding-frock, upon which she was sewing some very old lace, at the sound of his footsteps and the jingle of his spurs across the courtyard.

"How did you know the sound of his footsteps?" I asked as a small boy. "Why couldn't it have been John Brown, or one of the other officers?"

"John Brown didn't wear spurs, my dear," she answered sharply, "and any girl in love knows the sound of her man's footsteps. I should have known William's way of walking in a mob. So light and springy!"

She called out to him from the window, which was thirty feet from the ground.

"Is that you, Mr. Anson?"

He stopped and saluted, as she could see in the dim twilight.

"At your service, Miss Kate."

"Give my love to the Guard!" she said.

Very daring, surely, for a Victorian young lady!

Perhaps that distance of thirty feet gave Lieutenant Anson courage which he lacked on the level with her at that time.

"Does that include the officer of the guard?" he asked.

"If he thinks it will do him any good," she answered, laughing rather nervously.

"Beyond anything in the world," he protested so ardently that she trembled a little as she held the dimity curtain against those thick old walls of the room in the Round Tower.

He saluted again and then made a right-about turn and paced across the gloomy courtyard, and it was some minutes afterwards when Aunt Kate went back to that wedding-frock and pricked her finger so that a little drop of blood stained the white silk. She showed it to me one day—that tiny stain. "My heart's blood," she said, and at those words, spoken aloud in her bedroom, she burst into tears and was found sobbing bitterly by her mother (my grandmother) who said, "What in the world is the matter, my dear?"

There are some points in this story of which I have some doubt now that I come to write it. I am, for instance, doubtful how it was that Lieutenant Anson came to play whist and spend the evenings—when he was not on duty—in my grandfather's rooms, sometimes when Canon Langport joined them and sometimes when that reverend gentleman was not present. Perhaps Aunt Kate was the conspirator who arranged this state of affairs, or perhaps the canon, who was a genial and simple man, despite a certain portentousness due to his cloth and age, was glad that his nephew should find such pleasant company, and had no suspicion that he was endangering his own happiness. Certain it is that Lieutenant Anson played a good many games of whist for penny points, with Aunt Kate for his partner, and that he also revealed the charm of his tenor voice and sang "Sally in Our Alley," "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes," "The Arab's Farewell to His Steed," and other ballads which one still finds in old English song books, to Aunt Kate's accompaniment on the pianoforte.

A shy young man, as I have told. Very quick to blush because of his fair skin. But some of the shyest men are most ardent when they love, and as an officer of the Guards, he was

naturally endowed with courage. There has been a lot of talk lately about the younger generation, and some of our novelists have spent themselves in describing the audacities of "Flaming Youth," and the indiscretions of post-war girls. Well, all I can say is that Lieutenant Anson and Aunt Kate, who were born in the Early Victorian era, took great risks in Windsor Castle, under the very nose almost of Queen Victoria.

There was one night when Aunt Kate crept down into the Long Corridor an hour or more after she was supposed to be tucked in bed, and tapped at the door of the small room which William Anson had for his use during the night guard.

He had been playing whist with her that evening and had trumped one of my grandmother's tricks and then revoked shamefully, so that my grandfather rebuked him rather sharply. The truth was that he had lost himself in Aunt Kate's eyes. He had told her, as clearly as any man tells woman, that he loved her, and that he was suffering anguish and hell's tortures, and other dreadful emotions, because she was engaged to his uncle. All that without a word. Then on the pretext of giving her a scarf which she had, I am sure, dropped deliberately under the card table, he had followed her out of the room when she had said good night, and had seized her hand and pressed it to his lips. For a moment she had half-fainted against his chest, and then had slipped away like a little white ghost. But now, an hour or more later—it was after midnight—she crept down again to that little room and entered it before he was aware of her. He was sitting in a velvet-padded chair, with his legs outstretched and his chin dug into his chest, across which his arms were folded tightly. By his side his sword lay across a small table, and the light from the candelabra gleamed upon his fair hair and golden whiskers. He was a picture of dejected youth and downcast gallantry, and Aunt Kate's heart (she told me) jumped at the sight of him so that all her spirit yearned towards him.

"William!" she whispered.

He sprang up from his chair and stared at her as though not sure of her reality. Then he strode towards her and held her tight in his arms and kissed her on the lips and eyelids. (Aunt Kate insists that he kissed her on the eyelids, though it seems to me improbable.)

"I love you," he vowed. "There is no need to tell you. Our hearts speak to each other."

"William!" she cried. "What shall we do? . . . Your uncle? . . . That dreadful marriage!"

She did not disguise her love for him, after those kisses. She stood there with her face against his scarlet tunic, and the design of one of his buttons was sealed on her cheek, so tightly did he hold her.

"My uncle is a ridiculous Old Buffer," said Lieutenant Anson. "The idea of his marrying you is preposterous, by Jove. I will go through fire and water to make you mine. Through streams and floods. The elemental powers cannot frustrate our love. My beautiful Kate! My most innocent and sweet child!"

The youth of this age will not believe it possible that their grandfathers and grandmothers ever spoke like that in Victorian days, but I have it on my aunt's authority. Anyhow, there they were alone in a room of Windsor Castle, at an hour past midnight, and there Aunt Kate stayed until dawn crept through the arched windows, when, like a mouse, she stole back to her own room, observed only by a sentry on the Long Corridor, who thought the worst, or the best, of his young officer and, no doubt, had a good story to tell his fellow Grenadiers.

That was indiscreet enough, and goodness knows what would have happened if the Mistress of the Robes—"that old wretch"—had happened to be passing down the Long Corridor that early morning after a sleepless night or an attack of indigestion.

But their greatest indiscretions were their secret meetings in Windsor Great Forest. Six times in all did they meet by a certain giant oak sufficiently removed from the public drives to be secluded and safe, they thought, on those summer afternoons. Six times Aunt Kate listened to William Anson's vows of eternal love, and wept on his chest when she confessed that her courage failed her at the thought of the wedding with his uncle which was drawing near and from which she could see no way of escape.

"You must break your engagement to the Old Buffer," said William Anson sternly.

"But the Queen is coming to the wedding!" said Aunt Kate. "The Queen approves of my marriage, William."

William groaned. That was a daunting thought, even to him in the very fire of his love.

"The Queen is very gracious," he said loyally. "She will understand your unhappiness, my darling. You must get Lady Ely to intercede for us."

"Oh, I dare not!" cried Aunt Kate. "I dare not, William. The Queen's displeasure is the most frightful thing in the world."

"Then we must go away to the Continent," said William. "I will resign my commission in the Guards. We will be married at Calais and live in exile."

Aunt Kate wept again.

"I should ruin your career, dear William. You would hate me for spoiling your life. I should be despised by your brother officers."

He clasped her more tightly and kissed her with ardour.

And it was then that the awful thing happened. She was in his arms like that when there was a rustle of the undergrowth, and suddenly, before they were aware of any human presence, John Brown, the Queen's servant, stood before them. He spoke even before they saw him.

"Well, well," he said, with grim irony. "This is a pretty sight for sair een. Love-making in the woods, eh? And this young woman engaged to a reverend gentleman dedicated to the ministry of the Lord!"

He gave a harsh laugh, and then changed his tone and spoke sternly.

"It will be my duty to tell the Queen. Her Majesty is a moral woman and careful of her household and the proprieties of all those in her sairvice. To say nothing of her officers and gentlemen. . . . I shall inform the Queen, sir."

He addressed the last words to Lieutenant Anson, staring at him dourly under shaggy brows.

The lieutenant's fair skin flushed angrily and he spoke fiercely and foolishly:

"You may go to the devil, my man. . . . Learn to be respectful to your betters."

"Na, na," said John Brown. "It's you who go to the devil, sir, with this pretty wench. And I am respectful to my betters when they behave as such in the Lord's all-seeing eyes."

"Infernal old hypocrite!" muttered Lieutenant Anson as John Brown strode off through the undergrowth, while Aunt Kate was stricken with terror and sobbed in her lover's arms.



John Brown had no pity on those two young people. He informed the Queen that day of the awful sight he had seen in Windsor Great Forest, and he also took occasion to walk down to Canon Langport's house in the Horseshoe Cloisters, where he remained with the reverend gentleman for twenty minutes or more.

That happened when Aunt Kate lay face downwards on her bed, stuffing the corner of the pillow in her mouth to prevent the sound of her sobs from reaching my grandmother in the next room. She was in that state of fear and anguish, her eyes red with weeping, when the awful message came to her that the Queen wished to see her. It was brought by Lady Margery, the little maid of honour who was devoted to Aunt Kate in spite of their difference in rank.

"Quick, Kate! The Queen! I'm afraid she is very angry about something. What naughtiness have you been doing now? . . . And oh, my pretty one, how red your eyes are!"

There was no time to wash away those tear stains. Poor Aunt Kate went into the Queen's presence with puffed eyes and trembling limbs so that she nearly dropped when she made her curtsies.

The Queen was quite alone in her room, signing some papers—that beautiful signature with the long stroke to the V which always looks as though it had been engraved on copper-plate. Once she sighed deeply, as though overburdened with the cares of State, and took no notice at all of the little maid who waited on her until suddenly she thrust her papers away, looked sharply up, and regarded Aunt Kate with severe displeasure.

"You are a disgraceful young woman," she said harshly. "You were seen in the embraces of one of my officers to-day, alone in the Forest, like some gipsy girl. Do you deny that?"

Aunt Kate shook her head, and put her hands up to her face.

"Shocking and outrageous," said the Queen. "A young woman engaged to be married to a worthy and holy man! Almost on the eve of her wedding day! Have you no sense of modesty and virtue? Are you lost to all sense of shame? Have you no respect for your Queen?"

At each sentence her voice rose more angrily, and she tapped a paper knife on the blotting-pad before her as though rapping Aunt Kate's head. Her last words, "Have you no

respect for your Queen?" were uttered with an awfulness that was almost annihilating.

Aunt Kate was stricken into speechlessness. She bowed her head with her hands clasped upon her breast, and tears streamed down her little white face.

"You are dismissed from my service," said the Queen, tightening her lips. "To avoid further scandal, your guilty lover will be allowed to resign his commission in the Grenadier Guards. You will leave the Castle to-morrow morning."

It was for her lover's sake that Aunt Kate fell to the floor before the Queen's feet, imploring mercy for the young officer.

"Oh, ma'am! Oh, Your Majesty! He is such a brave young man. So noble. So devoted to Your Majesty's service. And our love has been innocent and pure!"

"I hope so," said the Queen. "I should like to believe it so. Get up, child. Restrain yourself."

She spoke less harshly, touched by the picture of that sobbing girl, who was presently led out of the room by one of the ladies-in-waiting, after the Queen had tinkled a little bell on her desk.

It was the Very Reverend Archibald Langport who was able to reprieve Aunt Kate from that dread sentence of dismissal. He behaved very nobly, with generosity of mind and self-forgetfulness, and he must have touched the Queen's heart by his plea for young love. To Aunt Kate herself, he was tender and magnanimous.

"My dear," he said, "there is no fool like an old fool. I do not blame you at all for falling in love with my good-looking nephew. I only blame myself for forgetting my age and the law of life which gives love to youth. I shall always be grateful for your patience with me, your kindness. . . . Now dry your eyes, my dear. Her Majesty has forgiven you. And perhaps you will let me take one little kiss—not as a lover, but as the uncle of your future husband."

As I went round Windsor Castle the other day with a crowd of American tourists, I thought of her there in her time of beauty, and to me, anyhow, her spirit has joined the historic ghosts of the old Castle, in which my father was born one day.



EDEN PHILLPOTTS

*Steadfast Samuel*

Eden Phillpotts abandoned insurance for literature in the nineties, and since then has been a prolific writer of novels, poems, stories and plays, several of which, in particular *The Farmer's Wife*, have enjoyed very long runs. He lives on Dartmoor, which is the setting of several of his books.



## STEADFAST SAMUEL

SAMUEL BORLASE was one of them rare childer who see his calling fixed in his little mind from cradlehood. We all know that small boys have big ideas and that they fasten on the business of grown-up people and decide, each according to his fancy, how he be going to help the world's work come he grows up. This child hopes to be a chimney-sweep, and this longs to be a railway-porter; scores trust to follow the sea and dozens wish for to be a soldier, or a 'bus-conductor, a gardener, or a road-cleaner, as the ambition takes 'em. My own grandson much desired to clean the roads, because, as he pointed out, the men ordained for that job do little but play about and smoke and spit and watch the traffic and pass the time of day with one another. He also learned that they got three pounds a week of public money for their fun, and half-holidays of a Saturday, so to his youthful mind it seemed a likely calling.

But most often the ambitions of the human boys be like to change if their parents get much luck in the world, so when you see a steadfast creature, like Samuel Borlase, answer the call in his heart almost so soon as he can walk and talk, you feel the rare event worth setting down.

When he was four year old (at any rate, so his mother will take her oath upon) Sam said he'd be a policeman, and at twenty-four year old a policeman he became. What's more, chance ordained that he should follow his high calling in the village where he was born, and though the general opinion is that a lad, who goes into the civil forces, be like to perform better away from his sutroundings, where he was just a common object of the countryside with none of the dignities of the law attaching to him, yet in this case it fell out otherwise and Borlase left home to become a policeman and in due course returned, the finished article. Naturally with such a history behind him and the ambition of a lifetime to fall back upon, the authorities found no difficulty with

Samuel, because he had a policeman's mind and a policeman's bearing and outlook upon life from his youth up. He thought like a policeman about the mysteries of existence; he regarded his neighbours with a policeman's inquiring eyes, because a policeman has a particular glance, as you'll find if you have much to do with 'em; and he moved like a policeman with the might and majesty of law and order ever before his eyes.

He confessed in later time that he pushed his great theories of perfection rather hard in his earlier years; and he came back to his native village of Thorpe-Michael full of high intentions to lift the place higher than where it already stood. He had an unyielding habit of tidiness and hated to see children playing in a road; and he hated worse to see a motor-car come faster round a corner than it did ought; or any sign of unsteady steps in a man or woman, who'd stopped too long at the "Queen Anne" public-house, or anything like that. He weren't what you might call an amusing man and he hadn't yet reached the stage to make allowances and keep his weather eye shut when the occasion demanded it; but these high branches of understanding was likely to develop in time, and Inspector Chowne, who ruled over him when these things fell out, always held of Samuel Borlase that the material was there and the man hadn't took up his calling without promising gifts to justify it.

"I'd sooner see him fussy than careless," said Chowne, "because life cures a chap of being fussy, if he's got a brain and a sensible outlook; but the careless and slack sort go from bad to worse, and I ain't here to keep my constables in order: they be here to strengthen my hands and keep the rest of the people in order."

He didn't judge Samuel would ever rise to the top of the tree, any more than what he'd done himself; for Chowne was one who had long lost illusions as to a leading place. He'd made a woeful mess of the only murder case that ever happened to him, and he well knew that anything like great gifts were denied him. But he saw in Samuel such another as himself and judged that Borlase was born to do his duty in the place to which he had been called, and would run his course and take his pension without any of the fierce light of fame.

Of course, Samuel had his likes and dislikes, and he knew

which of the community might be counted to uphold him and which might prove a thorn in his side. In fact he was acquaint with most everybody, and as happens in every village, where there's game preserves and such-like the doubtful characters were there; and Thorpe-Michael chancing to lie up a creek near the port of Dartmouth, there was river-rats also—said to do a little in a mild way at smuggling from the Channel Islands—a business long sunk from its old fame. Yet the grandsons of vanished "free-trade" grandfathers were thought to carry on a bit when chance offered.

It was a subject about which there were two opinions, and Billy Forde and others vowed most certain that the law was far too strong to allow of any free-trading nowadays; but, just because Billy and his friends were so sure, the policeman mind of Sam Borlase suspected 'em. He judged it suited Billy's convenience to declare that no such things happened, the more so because Mr. Forde's own father was well known to have broke a preventive officer's arm in his youth and done time for the same.

But a man by the name of Chawner Green it was that caused Samuel the greatest mistrust. He had nought to do with the creek, but lived in his own cottage, a mile out of Thorpe-Michael; and the keepers at the big place by name of Trusham, hard by, declared that Mr. Green was a fearsome poacher and hated the sight of the little man, though never had they catched him red-handed, nor been able to fetch up legal proofs against him.

There was a bit of a complication with Chawner Green, because Inspector Chowne happened to be related to him by marriage. In fact, Chawner had married the Inspector's sister five-and-twenty years before, and though Mrs. Green was long since dead, the Inspector never quarrelled with his brother-in-law and regarded him as a man who had got a worse name in the parish than he deserved. So there it was: the keepers at Trusham always felt that Chowne stood against 'em in their valiant endeavours to catch out Chawner; while the officer took his stand on the letter of the law and said that he held the balance of justice as became him, but weren't going to believe no tales nor set the law in motion against Mr. Green until the proofs stood before him.

It chanced that the under-keeper at Trusham was but three year older than Samuel Borlase himself and a lifelong



friend, so Samuel got influenced and came to view Chawner Green very unfavourable. He found himself in rather a delicate position then, but his simple rule was to do what he thought his duty. To look at, Samuel was a big, hard man, rather on the lean side, with a blue chin and a blue eye, which don't often go together. His brow was a bit low and his brain didn't move far out of his appointed task ; but a country policeman has a lot of time on his hands, and upon his long country beats, while his eyes surveyed the scene, Sam's intellects would turn over affairs and, no doubt, arrive at conclusions about 'em. And his conclusion about Chawner Green was that he must be a devious bird, else he wouldn't be so idle. For Samuel held that a chap of five-and-fifty, and hard as a nut, which Chawner was known to be, did ought to do honest work—an occupation never connected in the public mind with Mr Green.

There'd been a wedding a bit back along and Chawner's daughter had married a respectable shopkeeper at a neighbouring town ; and Samuel Borlase reflected rather gloomily that the small shopkeeper was a fish and poultry merchant—also a seller of game. To his policeman's mind there was a lot more in that than met the eye ; and no doubt the born policeman do see a lot more in everything than what us everyday people may remark. Then, on a lonely beat, one autumn day to the north side of Trusham, there came, like a bolt from the blue, the great event of Sammy's life, not only from a professional standpoint, but also an affair that led to far higher things in the shape of a female.

There was a bit of rough, open land there that gave from the covert edge, with scattered brake-fern and a stream in the midst and a lot of blackthorn scrub round about. A noted place for a woodcock, also a snipe, and a spot from which trespassers were warned very careful. So Samuel took a look over to see that all was quiet, and there, in the midst, he marked a big girl struggling with a sloe-bush ! But, quick though he was, she'd seen him first, and before he could call out and order her back to the road and take her name, she cried out to him :

“Will 'e lend me a hand, Mister Policeman, if you please ? I be caught in thicky sloan tree.”

So Borlase went to her aid and he found a basket half full of amazing sloes and a maiden the like of which he never had

found afore. A tall piece with flaxen hair and a face so lovely as a picture. Her eyes were bluer than Samuel's and twice so large, and she had a nose a bit tip-tilted and a wonderful mouth, red as a rose and drawn down to the corners in a very fascinating manner. She was sturdy and well rounded, and looked to be a tidy strong girl, and her voice struck the policeman as about the most beautiful sound as he'd heard out of human lips. He saw in half a shake as she weren't in no trouble really, but had just challenged to take the wind out of his sails; and when she'd got free of the thorns, she thanked him with such a lot of gratitude for rescuing of her that 'twas all he could do to keep his face. A lovely thing sure enough; and such is the power of beauty that Samuel felt a caution might be sufficient. He was out to fright her, however, and he was terrible interested also, because he'd never seen the maid before and felt a good bit thtunderstruck by such a wonder. She disarmed his curiosity without much trouble, and the truth decided him to do no more; because he found she had a way to her that made him powerless as a goose-chick.

"Didn't you see the board?" he asked; and she assured him that she had not.

"I'm a stranger in these parts as yet," she said, "and I was by here yesterday and marked these wonderful sloan, so I came to-day with a basket, because my father's very fond of sloe gin, you understand, and I'm going to make him some, if you'll be so kind as to let me keep the berries. I much hope you'll do so, please young man, and I give you my word solemn and faithful never to come here no more."

Their blue eyes met and 'twas Samuel's that looked down first.

"Who might your father be?" he asked.

"Mr. Chawner Green," she answered. "'Tis this way with us, you see. My sister, that kept house for him, have just married, and so now I be come to take care of father."

"He can take care of himself by all accounts," answered Samuel, but in quite an amiable tone of voice, because the girl's magic was already working upon him.

"Can he?" she said. "I never heard of no man that can take care of himself. Can you? Anyway, my father can't. He's as helpless as most other men be without a woman to mind 'em. And I love to be here. I was in service, but this

a lot better than service, and Thorpe-Michael's a dear little place, don't you think?"

Samuel didn't say what he thought of Thorpe-Michael. He'd got a powerful feeling in him that he wanted to know her name, and he asked her to tell him.

"You ain't going to put it down in your policeman's book, are you?" she said. "Because I sinned in ignorance and it would be very ill-convenient if I got in trouble with the police afore I'd been here a fortnight."

"You'll never get in trouble with the police," explained Samuel. "In the first place, Inspector Chowne is related to your father."

"He's my uncle," she answered, "and a dear man."

"And he's a tower of strength," continued Samuel, "and as for getting in trouble with me, that I can promise you you never will do if you behave."

She looked up at him under her eyelids and felt a flutter at her heart-strings, for if ever there was a case of love at first sight it happened when Chawner Green's younger daughter was caught in the sloan bushes by Sam Borlase. If he liked her voice, she liked his, and if he admired her nice shoulders, she was equally pleased with his great broad ones. Just the old craft of nature once more, as happens at every time in the year and turns all seasons into spring.

"I'm called Cicely," she said—"Sis' for shortness. And what be you called?"

"My name's Samuel Borlase," he answered, and she nodded.

"I'll remember," she said.

In five minutes they were walking side by side to her home, which lay along the policeman's beat; and he carried her basket and talked about local affairs.

He was a bit shaken, however, to know she belonged to Chawner, and wished with all his heart that she had not.

Mr. Green was in his garden when they came along and he struck a tragical attitude and poked fun at 'em, for no man loved a joke better than what he did.

"Already!" he cried. "Have she fallen into evil already, Borlase? Be the sins of the fathers visited on the childer so soon?"

But the girl hastened to explain.

"He's been merciful, dad," she explained. "Mr. Borlase

caught me stealing sloe berries for your sloe gin ; but I didn't know I was stealing, you see, for I thought they were free, so he's forgived me and I ban't to hear no more of it this time."

"Then he can come in and have a drop of the last brew," declared Chawner ; "but just look round afore he enters and see as no fur nor feathers be about in the house-place to fret him."

Samuel, however, with all his virtues, weren't much a man for a joke, and at another time this speech would have earned a rebuke from him in the name of law and order. But afore Cicely, and in sound of her voice, he felt amazed to find law and order sink into the background for a minute, though for a minute only, of course.

He explained he was on duty and mustn't have no refreshment just then ; but such is the power of passion that he loitered a full sixty seconds after he'd set down Cicely's basket.

"You come in and taste my sloe gin another day, then," said Green, who knew Samuel was in the other camp with the gamekeepers and liked the thought of pulling his leg ; but the surprise was Chawner's then, for instead of a short answer, Samuel thanked him as mild as milk, vowed that to his way of thinking sloe gin couldn't be beat and said he'd certainly accept the invitation and come for a drop. Nor did he leave it doubtful when he would come. He acted very crafty indeed and invited Chawner to name the time and hour ; on hearing which the girl showed so much interest as he did himself and fixed the time and hour for him.

"Fetch in to tea o' Sunday, Mr. Borlase," she said. "I make father put on his black 'Sundays' of an afternoon, and I'll see he's to home."

Then Sam went his way, and when he was gone Cicely praised him for a very understanding chap.

"The sloan in them thickets be a joy," she said, "and if you'll buy the gin, I'll get the fruit. And I dare say he'll catch me there again come presently. He's a handsome fellow, whatever else he may be."

So it began that way, and then the majesty of love got hold upon 'em and enlarged both their minds as it be wont to do. For there's nothing further from the truth than the saying that love makes a man, or a woman, a fool.

Anyway, Samuel come to tea, and he ate a big one and

drank two glasses of the sloe gin after ; and when he went away, he knew he loved Cicely Green better than anything in the world, and she knew she loved him. But while the man went home and confessed his secret to his mother, a good bit to her astonishment, the girl hid her heart from her father and only showed it in her eyes when she was all alone. The signs amazed her, for she had never loved before, and when she found as she couldn't trespass for no more sloes after all, it broke in upon her that she must already be terrible addicted to Samuel. Because to obey any such order from an ordinary policeman would have been difficult to her nature.

Of course, Chawner very soon found it out and was a good bit amused and a thought vexed also, since he counted on a year at least of Cicely's company, though well knowing such a lovely young woman weren't going to devote herself to his middle-aged convenience for ever. He inquired concerning Samuel Borlase, and Inspector Chowne gave it as his opinion that the material was there, but explained that Sam stood all untried as yet and his value still doubtful.

And meantime Cicely took tea along with Samuel's mother and his old aunt, who lived with them, and told her father they were dear old people and a very nice and interesting pair indeed ; because if you're in love, the belongings of the charmer always seem quite all right at first and worthy of all praise.

In fact, Sam and Cicely lived for each other, as the saying is, afore six weeks were spent, and on Christmas Day, being off duty at the time, the policeman took an afternoon walk with Cicely Green and asked her to marry him.

"You know me," he said, "and very like a common constable lies far beneath your views, as well he may ; but there it is : I love you, to the soles of my feet, and if, by a miracle of wonder, you was to think I could win you, I'd slave to do so for ever more, my dinky dear."

"'Tis no odds you're a policeman," she said. "You've got to be something. And you very well know I love you, and life's properly empty when you ain't with me. There's nought else in the world that matters to me but only you."

With that the man swallowed her in his great arms and took his first kiss off her. In fact, the world went very well for 'em, till they stood afore Chawner, who demanded time. Indeed, he appeared to be a good bit vexed about it.

"Dash my wig!" he said, "who be you, you hulking bobby, to come upsetting my family arrangements and knocking my well-laid plans on the head in this fashion? Sis came here to look after me, didn't she, not to look after you. And 'tis all moonshine in my opinion, and I doubt if you know your own minds, for that's a thing this generation of youth never is known to do. And, be it as it will, time must pass—oceans of time—afore I can figure all this out and say whether 'tis to be, or whether it ain't."

They expected something like that, and Cicely had a plan.

"If Sam was to come and live along with you, father," she said, "then I shouldn't leave you at all and we would go on nice and comfortable together."

"For you, yes," said Chawner, winking his eye. "But what about me? I don't intend to neighbour so close as all that with a policeman, I do assure you, my fine dear. And so we'll watch and wait, and see if Samuel Borlase have got that fine quality of patience so needful to his calling—also what sort of hold he can show me on the savings bank, and so on."

Then he turned to the young man.

"I know nought against you, Samuel," he said, "but I know nothing for you neither. So it will be a very clever action if we just go on as we're going and see what life looks like a good year hence."

More than that Chawner wouldn't say; but he recognized they should walk out together and unfold their feelings, and he promised that in a year's time he'd decide whether Samuel was up to the mark for his girl.

He was a good bit of a puzzle to Borlase, but the younger, in justice, couldn't quarrel with the verdict, and he only hoped that Cicely wouldn't change her mind in such a parlous long time; for a year to the eye of love be a century.

Well, as elders in such a pass will do, Chawner took careful stock of Sam, and the more he gleaned of the young man's opinions the better he liked him. Old Green was tolerable shrewd, and along with a passion for natural history and its wonders, he didn't leave human nature out of account. He was going on with his own life very clever, unknown to all but one person, and among his varied interests was a boy-like love of practical joking. But among his occupations the story of Samuel Borlase came first for a bit, and he both talked

and listened to the young fellow and was a good bit amused on the quiet to find Samuel didn't hold by no means such a high opinion of him as he began to feel for the policeman.

Of course, Cicely was always there to help his judgment ; but though the natural instinct of the parent is to misdoubt a child's opinions—generally with tolerable good reason—it happened in this case that love lit the girl's mind to good purpose. She'd laugh with her father sometimes, that Sam hadn't no dazzling sense of fun himself, and it entertained her a lot to see Sam plodding in his mind after her nimble-witted father and trying in vain to see a joke. But what delighted her most was Sam's own dark forebodings about Mr. Green's manner of life, and his high-minded hopes that some day, come he was Chawner's son-in-law, he would save the elder man's soul alive. That always delighted Cicely above everything, and she'd pull a long face and sigh and share Samuel's fine ambitions, and hope how, between them in the future, they'd make her father a better member of society than the Trusham gamekeepers thought he was.

Not that Borlase could honestly say the marks of infamy came out in Mr. Green's view of life. He showed a wonderful knowledge of wild birds and beasts and plants even, and abounded in rich tales of poaching adventures, though he never told 'em as being in his own personal experience. He declared no quarrel with the law himself, but steadfastly upheld it on principle. At the same time a joke was a joke, and if a joke turned on breaking the game laws, or hoodwinking them appointed to uphold right and justice, Chawner would tell the joke and derive a good deal of satisfaction from Sam's attitude therepo.

So time passed and near a year was spent, but Chawner dallied to say the word and let 'em wed ; and the crash came on a night in October, when the policeman suddenly found himself called to night duty by Inspector Chowne. 'Twas a beat along the Trusham covers, and a constable had gone ill, and the gamekeepers were yowling about the poachers as usual, instead of catching 'em. So Samuel went his way and looked sharp out for any untoward sign of his fellow-man, or any unlawful sound from the dark woods, where Trusham pheasants harboured of a night. He was full of his own thoughts too, for he wanted cruel to be married, and so did

Cicely, and the puzzle was to get Mr. Green to consent without a rumpus.

Nought but a pair of owls hollering to each other did Samuel hear for a good bit. The moon was so bright as day, for the hunter's moon it happed to be at full, and all was silence and peace, with silver light on the falling leaves and great darkness in spruce and evergreen undergrowth. 'Twas at a gate that Sam suddenly heard a suspicious sound and stood stock-still. Footsteps he thought he heard t'other side of a low broken hedge, where birches grew and the gate opened into a rutted cart-track through the woods. The sound was made by no wild creature, pattering four-foot, but the quick tramp of a man, and when Sam stood still the sound ceased, and when he went forward he reckoned it began again. There was certainly an evil-doer on the covert side of the hedge, and Borlase practised guile and pretended as he'd heard nothing and tramped slowly forward on his way. But he kept his eyes over his shoulder and, after he'd gone fifty yards stepped into the water-table, as ran on the south side of the beat, and crept back under the darkness of the hedge so wily as a hunting weasel. Back he came as cautious as need be, and for a big and heavy chap he was very clever, and the only noise he made was his breathing. He got abreast of the gate, still hid in night-black shadows, and then he heard the muffled footfall again and a moment later a man sneaked out of the gate with a gun in one hand and a pheasant in the other. Sam licked his hands and drew his truncheon, and then the moon shone on the face before him and the light of battle died out of his eyes. For there was Chawner Green with a fur cap made of a weasel skin drawn down over his head and the moonshine leaving no doubt as to his identity.

Chawner stood a moment and peeped down the road to see if the policeman was gone on his way. Then out strode Samuel and the elder man used a crooked word and stared upon him and dropped his pheasant in the road. He turned as to fly but 'twas too late, for Sam's leg-of-mutton hand was on his neckerchief and Mr. Green found himself brought to book at last.

And then Samuel saw a side of Chawner's character as cast him down a lot, for the man put up a mighty fight—not with fists, because he was a bit undersized and the policeman could have put him in his pocket if need was ; but with his



tongue. He pleaded most forcibly for freedom, and when he found his captor was dead to any sporting appeal, he grew personal and young Borlase soon found that he was up against it.

At first Chawner roared with laughter.

"By the holy smoke," he said, "I'm in luck, Sam! I thought 'twas Billy King had caught me, and then I'd have been in a tight place, for Billy's no friend of mine; but you be a different pair of shoes, thank the Lord! Take your hand off, there's a bright lad, and let me pick up my bird."

"I'm cruel sorry for this—cruel sorry," began Samuel in great dismay. "I'd rather have any misfortune fall to my lot than have took you, Mr. Green."

"Then your simplest course will be to forget you have done so," answered the older man. "You go your way and I'll go mine. Your job's on the road, so you stop on it, Sammy, and if they busy chaps pop along, you can say you've heard nought moving but the owlets."

"Duty's duty," replied Sam. "You must come along with me, I guess. Give me your air-gun, please, and pick up thicky bird."

Green thought a moment, then he handed over the gun and picked up the pheasant and began on Borlase most forcible. He pleaded their future relationship, the disgrace, the slur on his character and the shame to his girl; and Samuel listened very patient and granted 'twas a melancholy and most misfortunate affair; but he didn't see no way out for either of 'em.

"Duty's duty," he kept saying in his big voice, like a bell tolling.

And then Chawner changed his note and grew a bit vicious.

"So be it, Borlase," he said. "If you're that sort of fool, I'll go along with you this instant moment to the police-station; but mark this: so sure as a key's turned on me this night, by yonder hunter's moon I swear as you shan't marry Cicely. That's so sure as I stand here, your captive. If there's a conviction against me, you'll whistle for that woman, and God's my judge I'm telling truth."

Well, Samuel weren't so put about at that as the other apparently expected to find him. He well knew the size of Cicely's love for him, and he'd heard her praise his straightness a thousand times. 'Twas true enough she set great store on her father; but love's love, and Sam was quite smart

enough to know that love for a parent goes down the wind afore love for a lover. He looked forward, therefore, and weren't shook of his purpose by no threats.

"That's as may be," he said, "and you've no right, nor yet reason, to speak for her. She loves me as never a woman loved a man, and if she saw me put my love afore my duty, I'll tell you what she'd say—she'd say she'd been mistook in me."

"And don't she love me, you pudding-faced fool!" cried Chawner. "Don't she set her father higher than a man she hasn't known a year? Be fair to yourself, Borlase, or else you'll lose the hope of your life. My honour's her honour and my reputation is her reputation. She thinks the world of me and she's a terrible proud woman; and you can take it from me so sure as death that she'll hold my side against you and cast you off if you do this fatal thing."

Samuel chewed over that a minute; but he decided as he didn't believe a word of it.

"We haven't kept company in vain for ten months and four days, Chawner Green," he said. "I mean me and your girl. She's the soul of upright dealing, and if you was a better man, you'd know it so well as I do."

"She may be," said the other, "but she'll honour her father's name afore she'll see him in your hands. She'll think the same as I do about this night's work, and dare you to lay a finger on me if ever you want to look in her face again."

They argued over that a bit and Chawner cussed and swore, because he said the keepers would be on to 'em in half a minute and all lost.

And then he got another idea and challenged Samuel for the last time.

"List to this," he said. "Cicely will be sitting up, though it have gone midnight. She knows I'm out on my occasions—lawful or otherwise—and she'll be there with a bit of hot supper against my return. We pass the door. And if you're still mad enough to hold out against me, you can hear her tell about it with your own ears and see if you are more to her than what I am. She'll hate your shadow when she hears tell of this."

And Samuel, though his mind was in a pretty state by now, agreed to it. Chawner's confidence shook him a bit, for he wasn't a vain man; and yet he saw pretty clear that

Cicely would be called to decide betwixt father and lover in any case, and felt the sooner the ordeal was over the better for all concerned. They went their way and never a word more would Borlase answer, though Green kept at him like a running brook to change his mind and act like a sensible man and not let a piece of folly spoil his own life. But he bided dumb until they reached the home of the Greens; and there stood Cicely at the gate with the moon throwing its light upon her and making her lint-white locks like snow.

"Powers in Heaven!" cried Cicely. "What be this, father?"

And her parent made haste to tell her, while Sam stood mute. But when she heard all, the maiden made it exceeding clear how she felt on the subject and turned upon Borlase very short and sharp.

"Let's have enough of this nonsense, Sam," she said. "You know me and I know you. You be more to me than ever I thought a living man could be, and I love the ground under your feet, and I be your life also, unless you're a liar. So that's that. But a father's a father, and because my father is more to me, after you, than all the world together, I'll ask you please to drop this tragedy-acting and go about your business and let him come in the house. Give me that gun and get to your work, and kiss me afore you go."

She stretched out her hand for the gun, but he wouldn't part with it. He stared upon her and the sweat stood in beads all over his big face.

"This be a night of doom seemingly, and I little thought you'd ever beg for anything I could give as would be denied, Sis," he said; "but you be called to see this with my eyes. I've had the cruel misfortune to catch Mr. Green doing evil, and well he knowed he was; and duty's duty, so he must come along with me. And if you know me, as well as you do know me, you know there's nought else possible for me now."

She lifted her voice for her father, however, and strove to show him what a pitiful small thing it was.

"What stuff are you made of, my dear man?" cried Cicely. "Be a wretched bird that nobody owns, and may have flown to Trusham from the other side of the country, going to make you outrage my father and disgrace his family? I could be cross if I didn't reckon you was in a waking dream."

She ran on, but he stopped her, for he knew his number was up by now and didn't see no use in piling up no more agony for any of 'em.

"Listen!" he shouted out, so as the woods over against 'em echoed with the roar of his big voice. "Listen to me, the pair of you, and be done. I can't hear no more, because there's higher things on earth than love of woman. I'm paid—I'm paid the nation's money, you understand, to do my duty. I'm paid my wages by the State, and I've made an oath afore God Almighty to do what I've undertaken to do to the best of my human power. And I've caught a man doing evil, and I've got to take him to justice if all the angels in heaven prayed me to let him free."

"If the angels in heaven be more to 'e than her you've called an angel on earth, Samuel," answered back Cicely, "then be it so. I understand now the worth of all you've said—and swore also; but your oath to the police stands higher than your oaths to me seemingly, so there's no call to waste no more of your time, nor yet mine. Only know this: if my father sleeps in clink to-night, I'll never wed you, nor look at you again, so help me, God! And now what about it?"

"Think twice," he said, walking very close to her and looking in her beautiful eyes. "Think twice, my dear heart."

But she shook her head and he only see tears there full of moonshine.

"No need to think twice," she answered. "You know me, Samuel."

He heaved a hugeous sigh then and looked at the waiting man. Chawner was swinging his pheasant by the legs and regarding 'em standing up together. But he said nought.

Then Samuel turned and beckoned Mr. Green with a policeman's nod that can't be denied. And Chawner followed after him like a dog, while Cicely went in the house and slammed home the door behind her.

Not a word did either man utter on their tramp to the station; but there they got at last, and the lights was burning and Inspector Chowne, whose night duty it happed to be, was sitting nodding at his desk. And when Sam stood before him and in a very disordered tone of voice brought the sad news of how the Inspector's brother-in-law had been took red-handed coming out of Trusham, a strange and startling thing followed. For, to the boy's amazement, Inspector

Chowne leapt from his seat with delight, and first he shook Chawner's hand so hearty as need be and then he shook Sam's fist likewise; and Chawner, the fox that he was, showed a lot of emotion and his voice failed him and he shook Samuel by the hand also! In fact, 'twas all so contrary to law and order, and reason also, that Samuel stared upon the elder men and prayed the scene was a nightmare and that he'd wake up in his bed any minute.

And then the Inspector spoke.

"Fear nothing, Borlase," he said. "You're saved alive, and you can take a drink out of my whisky bottle in the cupboard if you've got a mind to it. 'Tis this way, my bold hero. My brother-in-law, Mr. Green here, have a sense of fun as be hidden from the common likes of you and me. He's a great naturalist, and he haunts the woods for beetles and toadstools and the like, and I may tell you on his account that he's a person of independent means, and would no more kill a pheasant, not yet a guinea-pig, that belonged to another man, than he'd fly over the moon. But when he heard the Trusham keepers thought he was a poacher, such was his love of a lark that he let 'em go on thinking so, and he's built up a doubtful character much to my sorrow, though there ain't no foundation in fact for it. But he laughs to see the scowling faces, though after to-night he'll mend his ways in that respect I shouldn't wonder."

Samuel stared and looked at the gun in his hand and the pheasant in Chawner's. It comed over him now that Inspector was going back on him and meant to take Green's side.

"What about these?" he said.

"I'll come to them," continued Chowne. "Now you fell in love with my niece and, as becomes a father, Mr. Green have got to size you up. And he took a tolerable stern way so to do; but there again his sense of fun mastered him. He told Sis you was still untried and a doubtful problem, though nought against you, and she said, being terrible trustful of you, that nought would come between you and your duty. And so this here man thought out a plan; and if the devil could have hit on a craftier, or yet a harsher, I'd be surprised. But mark this, Samuel: he laid it afore Cicely afore he done it. And such was her amazing woman's faith, she agreed to it, because her love for you rose above all doubt. 'Twas a plant, my boy; and if you'd let Mr. Green go his way, you'd

have lost your future wife; but because you've done your duty, you've got her; and may she always have the rare belief in you she has to-night."

Still Sam found it hard to believe he was waking. But he done a sensible thing and went to Inspector's private tap and poured himself four fingers.

"Here's luck," he said; and Chawner Green always told afterwards that it was the first and last joke his son-in-law ever made.

'Twas he who spoke next.

"Now look at this pheasant," ordered Chawner; and the young man handled the bird and found it stiff and cold.

"How long should you judge it had been dead?" inquired Mr. Green. "Anyway, I'll tell you. Sis bought that creature at her sister's husband's fish and poultry shop two days agone. You'll certainly make a policeman to talk about, Sam; but I'm fearing you'll never rise to be a detective."

They went out together five minutes later, Sam to his beat and Green to his home. And the elder was in a very human frame of mind, but Samuel hadn't quite took it all in yet.

Then they came to the elder's house, and there was the girl at the gate waiting for 'em as before.

"When she went in and banged the door, you thought she'd gone to weep," said Chawner; "but for two pins, Samuel, I'd have told you she was dancing a fandango on the kitchen floor. 'Tis a very fine thing for a woman to know her faith is so truly founded, and she's got the faith in you would move mountains; and so have I; and you can wed when you've a mind to it."

So Chawner left 'em in each other's arms for five minutes, and then Samuel went on his way.

A very happy marriage, and a week after they joined up, Chawner married a new-made widow, which he had long ordained to do in secret; but she wouldn't take him till a year and a day was passed.

And Samuel would often tell about his wife's faith in aftertime and doubt if the young men he saw growing up around him would have rose to such fine heights as what he done.

But then Cicely would laugh at him and tell him that his own son was just so steadfast as ever he was, and plenty other women's sons also.



COSMO HAMILTON  
*The Little Gold Ring*

Cosmo Hamilton, dramatist and novelist, is a member of the well-known literary family which includes Sir Philip Gibbs. He is the author of a long list of successful plays and musical comedies and over twenty novels.





## THE LITTLE GOLD RING

HAREWOOD was startled by a sudden urgent voice.

Already, on the verge of sleep, he had been swung back into consciousness by the sharp click of his gate and the sounds of someone blundering among the old stone steps that led up to the terrace. The night was moonless, and the cottage, in complete darkness, was far from the inadequate lamp that marked the bend of the lonely road.

"Is anyone awake here? If so, will he or she be good enough to speak to me at once?"

Relighting the still warm candle, into whose flame a series of moths had headed to ecstatic death, Harewood got out of bed, put on his dressing-gown and went to the open window. There was something in the peremptory voice of the man below which, although perfectly polite, suggested the right to disturb people, however late the hour. He was standing with one tapping foot on the border of bricks that divided a wide bed of geraniums from the path. In the mysterious softness of a June night, when a virgin moon trembles behind the protection of the clouds, he appeared to be tall and wiry. He was carrying his cap, and as he stood clear-cut against the sky there was something in his profile that stirred the memory of an offensive incident in Harewood's mind.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

The face was turned up to the window. "My wife and I are driving, or have been trying to drive, to Dover—engine trouble almost all the way. We're now come to an absolute full stop at the bottom of your lane, having turned off the main road by mistake. We can't camp out in the car all night. It's open, and the dew's confoundedly heavy. I saw a light in your window while we were discussing what to do, and so I've stumbled up to ask you to help us if you will. We shall be greatly obliged."

"I'll come down," said Harewood. "Only too glad, of course, to do what I can."

This was very bad luck. Something invariably prevented him from sleeping off the wear and tear of a hard-working week in order that he might be in good fettle for golf on Saturday and Sunday. The week before, for instance, his dog had been ill and had had to be nursed all night, and three or four Fridays ago the vicar had insisted upon talking politics until the small hours of the morning. It was obvious that he would now be obliged to lose one valuable hour while he played the good Samaritan to this stranded man and his wife. He would be called upon probably to forage for food in the kitchen. The quaint old soul who ran the cottage had been in bed since ten, and his sister, asleep on the other side of the house, never permitted herself to be taken unawares and would certainly not make an appearance until she had done those things to her face that went with bridge-fights, race-meetings and the gatherings of the literati. She was a beauty, you see.

Human sympathy demanded the extension of a helping hand, however, and so, carrying the flickering candle, Harewood, noted for extreme good-nature, made his way down the narrow winding staircase to the stone-flagged sitting-room.

The cottage could boast of neither gas nor electricity. It was a primitive affair, five hundred years old in parts, and even the so-called modern wing of it dated back to good Queen Anne. As soon as he had given the room its usual Rembrandt effect by lighting the candles on the black oak armoire and those on the uneven shelf of the enormous fireplace, Harewood unbolted the door.

"Will you come in?" he asked.

"Very gladly indeed. Er . . . my name's Lamberhurst. George. Captain, late R.F.A. Sorry to disturb you, and grateful for your kindness. Jove, what a charming house!"

He took a stride or two into the room which had drawn his instant admiration, as it well deserved to do. It was filled with delightful things.

Harewood tied the rope of his dressing-gown and wore a rather proud smile. He loved the little place that he had bought before the War and to which he now escaped from London every week-end for refreshment of eye and spirit.

"I've never seen a better fireplace than that," Lamberhurst went on, genuinely interested and appreciative, and not saying nice things in order to smooth over his interruption of peace.

"It is rather amusing," said Harewood.

Upon which, evidently thinking that such an adjective was somewhat frivolous, the disturber shot a quick glance at the man whose beauty sleep he had ruined and whose face was in the light.

"My God!" he said to himself, turning away quickly to hide an uneasy flush. "Clive Harewood! . . . If he remembers me we shall spend the night in the car."

Harewood's examination of his uninvited guest had failed, however, to open up in his mind the chapter to which he belonged. He saw in him simply a typical member of his own class, a well-set-up, well-groomed person, with a good nose, a clipped moustache, a figure devoid of superfluous flesh, and a definite jaw-line. He had the steel-like fineness that goes with playing polo and the tanned skin of one who was fortunate enough to live in the open air. The memory that had been stirred by the outline of his face was a vague one and was not unclouded by a closer look. Before, during, and after the War he had met dozens of similar men, and yet, all the same, he felt pretty certain that there was something not altogether to the credit of this one in a mental pigeon-hole. He might, of course, be wrong. Under the circumstances, therefore, he would give him the benefit of the doubt.

"Make whatever use you care to of this cottage," he said. "There's absolutely no one within at least eight miles who can tinker at your car. Besides, it's late. Where's your wife?"

Enormously relieved, and more than a little astonished at having been forgotten, Lamberhurst swung back into confidence. "Damned nice of you," he said warmly. "I'll fetch her. She's sitting in the car. You don't happen to possess a lantern of sorts, I suppose? I nearly broke my neck coming up your jolly old steps."

Harewood laughed. Here was the sort of egoist who never hesitated to ask for whatever he required, from a whisky-and-soda to the best bedroom, from a lantern to a cigar. It was characteristic of all men whose hair grew rather low upon their foreheads.

"Any little thing like that," he said, and lit the one that was always kept in a recess at the side of the door. "I'll lead the way."

The garden had been made in three wide terraces on the slope of a hill. The steps up which Lamberhurst had blundered were lined with herbaceous borders in all their glory of colour and scent. Among the delicious flowers in which Clive Harewood took a paternal interest the star-like bloom of the tobacco-plant was the only one that slept with open eyes. The whole space was framed in ancient trees whose thickly-leaved branches stood out darkly against the sky.

Once again the gate clicked as the two men went into the lane. Recent rains had left the earth soggy. A stray cat from a near-by workman's cottage scuttled into the hedge. The luscious aroma of new-mown hay hung in the motionless air.

"We were late in leaving town," said Lamberhurst, walking in step. "Our idea was to sleep at the Lord Warden at Dover to-night and cross to Calais in the morning. We're going to potter about France for the rest of the summer."

"I see," said Harewood. "I envy you the chance."

"If you've got a telephone and will tell me who to ring up, I'll get on to the nearest garage in the early morning and clear out of your way."

Harewood laughed again. He had the gift of laughter. "Telephone? What do you take me for? Haven't even got water except what we pump ourselves. But there's one at the Black Bull, half a mile from here, and a pretty good mechanic at Kingstone Green who's up fairly early, I think. I don't run a machine, but Smith's quite useful, they tell me. Ah, I see."

The car, as dead as mutton, was in the middle of the road. It was smart and highly polished, with a silver angel on its bonnet with outstretched wings. All about it was that air of sheepishness that is worn on such occasions by the members of its breed. And there, leaning nonchalantly against its nearside door with a cigarette in her mouth, was a most attractive girl, very young and short-skirted, with an Eton bob. She was swinging a little round hat to the rhythm of the tune that she was humming.

In the soft light of the lantern with which he covered her Harewood saw all this, as well as two wide-apart eyes, a

little nose with a blunt tip, and an unusually humorous mouth.

"My wife," said Lamberhurst, adding after a brief hesitation: "You—you forgot to give me your name."

"Harewood, Clive. Major, late R.F.A." He provided the same Who's Who of himself as Lamberhurst had offered, and cut an odd appearance in that place with a dressing-gown over pyjamas and his feet in bathroom slippers. He was glad that his dressing-gown was a smart one, as things had turned out. He had never seen a more attractive girl than Mrs. George Lamberhurst.

A clear voice, round and warm, said, "How do you do? You must be cursing us. That's the worst of these cheap cars."

"We won't argue about that," said Lamberhurst. "The point is this: Major Harewood has been kind enough to say that we may use his cottage. If you'll carry your dressing-case, Diana, I'll take mine, and our host, if he doesn't mind, can bring up your small trunk. He looks a hefty fellow."

Harewood congratulated himself upon being a judge of character. It was like this man to put the heaviest weight into someone else's hands. "If you will take the lantern," he said to Mrs. Lamberhurst, "and lead the way, I'll manage both cases. The gate's on the left of the lane, about a hundred yards up. Look out you don't slip on the steps. They're wet."

"Thanks, a thousand times. I thought we were doomed to sit in the car. We're in luck to-night." She took the lantern, but before obeying orders flashed it coolly at Harewood. What she saw she liked.

She liked the cottage, too, and said so, both to herself and to its owner as soon as he arrived. She enthused about the thatch, the beams, the stone floor, the prints, the Toby jugs and the wide settles that stood on each side of the fireplace. She was very keen about the long line of pewter plates, the gunrack, the reek of tobacco and wet Harris tweed. "Exactly my idea of what a cottage should be," she wound up, and made herself at home.

When Harewood put down the suitcase at the foot of the stairs he noticed that the initials on it were not D. L., but D. B. "Honeymoon, probably," he said to himself. "No time yet to have acquired married luggage. Lucky fellow,

George." He was, therefore, much surprised when the young bride drew back from her husband's affectionate touch with a cutting expression of scorn.

To cover an incident which he knew had been seen by his host, Lamberhurst tried to laugh. Pachydermatous as he was, he was puzzled and hurt. How on earth had he earned that look, and brought about so unexpected an attitude?

Harewood tactfully broke an awkward silence by dumping the trunk on the floor.

Whereupon Lamberhurst spoke. "Have you any ideas, Harewood? I mean as to what precisely you'd like us to do? I can camp on one of the settles, of course, and be perfectly comfortable. But if, by any chance, you have a room in which my wife may sleep. . . ."

"Small as the cottage is," said Harewood, filling in the pause, "it boasts of a room for guests. I shall be only too delighted if you'll make use of it." He bowed to the charming bride. "Will you have something to eat? I don't know what there is in the larder, but I'm a wizard at scrambled eggs."

"No, no. Please don't bother," said Mrs. Lamberhurst. "I'm not hungry. And as for the spare room, it's awfully good of you to offer it to us. But, so far as I'm concerned, I'm far too wide-awake to attempt to sleep to-night. I'll sit here, if you don't mind, and read one of your numerous books."

There was a momentary flicker of anger in Lamberhurst's eyes. "I think that's absurd," he said sharply. "You'll be completely doggo in the morning. Why not take advantage of Harewood's kindness?" He turned to Harewood as though the matter was settled. "May I explore the geography of your house or will you lead the way?"

Appearing to accept the unspoken suggestion that argument was barred, Mrs. Lamberhurst made a long arm, opened the silver box that stood on the nearest table and tapped a cigarette expertly on the nail of her thumb.

Harewood picked up the cases and put his foot on the stairs. "Bring a candle," he said, "will you?" But on his way up he heard the two quick questions which were asked by his visitors.

"Diana, what on earth's the idea?"

"Did I never tell you how much I detest a liar?"

"I must wait until you come," said Harewood, reminding them that he was in earshot. "There are no lights upstairs." And as Lamberhurst followed immediately he proceeded on his way.

He was curious and astonished. There was something in this girl's icy dislike that puzzled him beyond words. The look of disgust that was in her eyes when she drew away from her husband seemed to be an amazing one to use on a honeymoon. He had assumed that that's what it was.

Lack of money had forced Harewood to do no more than think very vaguely of marriage. The War had swept him in at the beginning of his career at the Bar, and when he had had the luck to escape with his life had left him high and dry. Since the Armistice and the moral and mental upheavals from which he had had to recover, his struggle to regain a foothold in an overcrowded profession had occupied all his time. He was only now in a position to be able to keep a wife. He looked forward to marriage with what, he knew quite well, was an old-fashioned seriousness. In spite of the moral laxity of post-War days and the wild rush for divorce that was going on everywhere, he regarded marriage as an institution to be treated with idealism and even reverence. The peculiarity of the relationship between Lamberhurst and his wife, a charming and exceptional girl, struck a jarring note. He was not in the least surprised at the fact that Lamberhurst was a liar, but he wondered why Mrs. Lamberhurst had flung the word at his head after her perfectly affectionate attitude at the bottom of the lane. What had happened in the sitting-room to cause so sudden a split? "And where on earth," he asked himself, "have I seen this man before?"

The spare room was in apple-pie order. The neat old lady who ran the cottage always saw to that. The nice aroma of lavender was in the room. It came from those little bags that were placed in the drawers of the tallboy.

"Very jolly," said Lamberhurst, who seemed determined to be cheerful. "Really quite large, by Jove. I love these sloping floors." He put the dressing-case on the bed with an air of complete satisfaction. "I'll unpack for my wife," he added and commenced to open the case.

Harewood said "Good idea," left him to his work and returned to the sitting-room. He found the girl standing



with her back to the fireplace. It made a queer old frame for such a youthful figure. In the soft light of the candles she looked younger than ever, he thought, though unruffled and cool. She might, indeed, have been married for years and be the owner of the cottage. He had never seen a woman who could adjust herself to strange surroundings with such perfect ease.

"Your husband will have everything ready in about ten minutes," he said. "Of course you won't read all night. In the meantime, if I can do anything for you, please tell me."

She gave him a steady look and asked a most curious question.

"Is there a key in that bedroom door?"

"I think so. In fact, I'm sure there is. Why?"

"Only that I like a door with a key," she said. . . . "Are you by any chance a relation of the Major Harewood who was commanding a battery in March, 1918, near Villers Cotteret and was cut off during the Grand Retreat? He picked up my brother, who was badly wounded, and brought him in."

"By Jove!" said Harewood. "Then the 'B' I saw on your bag stands for Banbury. I heard a lot about you from your brother. How do you do, all over again!"

She laughed, and with a frank and trustful gesture held out her hand. "I thought I liked you in the light of the lantern," she said. "And now I know I do. Very small place, the world."

"And one of the best, if you know how to work it. I'm frightfully keen about life. And so you're the kid who wrote those amusing letters to Harry and supplied his mess with cigarettes! Are you the youngest of Lord Woodstock's brood?"

She nodded. "And rather by way of being the ugly duckling, I'm afraid."

"Haven't you escaped from the farm a bit before your time?" he asked. It would have been too hopelessly feeble to have refuted her statement—especially at a moment when her attraction was so magnetic. "Don't you think it might have been better if you had been content to swim about the pond for a year or two longer instead of making for the main stream quite so soon?"

"No," she said. "I don't think so. We of the younger generation are inclined to take risks, you know."

Harewood was thinking hard. "The odd part of it is," he said, "that I seem to know Lamberhurst, too."

"I thought I did," she said. "But I don't, as it turns out."

Which added another block to the picture puzzle that he was trying to build in which this girl and her husband played the leading parts. "I asked if I could do anything for you. Can you think of anything?" He felt bound to let her hand go. It belonged to another man.

She gave the question a moment's consideration, looking straight into his eyes the while. "Yes," she said finally, "there is. I shall be most awfully obliged if you will prevent George Lamberhurst from following me up. I mean for about five minutes. Do you think that you could keep him talking for that amount of time?"

"As long as you like," he said, "though it probably won't be easy." He had no intention of pressing for an explanation. He was not that sort of man. But he greatly hoped that she would lift even a fold of the veil of what was growing a mystery and give him a peep at the truth.

She seemed to be on the verge of doing so, but drew back like a rider at a rather difficult jump when steps were heard on the stairs. And so instead she said, "What time do you have breakfast generally?"

"Oh, about eight, as a rule."

"If you can give me ten minutes over your eggs and bacon I shall probably want to confide. George will have gone by then, if I know anything about it."

"You mean that you're—you're not going with him?"

"I do," she said. "This is the beginning and the end. But I shall have to ask you to help me if you will. I need a friend."

"Not merely for your brother's sake you can absolutely rely on me."

And before she could make any answer Lamberhurst came down. Her smile was, however, all the reward he needed for his pledge.

"All in order," said Lamberhurst. "Now, no nonsense, Diana. Toodle up to bed. It's a charming room and I've laid out all your things."

"Excellent," said Diana. "Where did you get your training as a maid?" And with a wave of her hand and a chuckle she mounted the creaking stairs.

With the slightly triumphant smile of a man who always

had had his own way, Lamberhurst possessed himself of a cigarette and the most comfortable chair. "A whisky-and-soda would be rather jolly," he said.

Harewood would have betted on that. And as he wanted one himself, feeling the need of a stimulant at that moment of puzzlement, he crossed to a cupboard on the far side of the room. But just as he was putting the bottle, a siphon and two glasses on a gate-legged table he heard a sound that made him look quickly at the man at his elbow, who seemed very willing to talk.

It was of a key that had been turned in a lock, the key of the spare room door.

Asking himself what the devil would happen next, Harewood saw a blaze of anger come into Lamberhurst's eyes. He, too, had heard that sound then, and was well aware of its meaning. With quiet deliberation he had been locked out. But with an excellent effort he controlled himself. His hand was perfectly steady when he mixed his drink. All that he permitted himself to say at the moment was, "Curious cattle, women. Well, here's luck." And then as Harewood stood with his back to the fireplace he went into a dissertation on the subject of cars and engines, main roads and signposts, as if nothing had happened to upset all his plans. It was really quite well done.

To all of which Harewood paid no attention. He was thinking of something else—of several other things. Harry Banbury was one of them, that reckless young flying man whom he had found under a smashed machine and carried back while he himself fought a rearguard action day after day for a week. From this mere lad, whose spirits had never wavered, he had heard of Di, the flapper sister, and listened to her cheery letters, which were full of fun. They had made him want to know that girl, of whom he had always retained a mental picture of a very flattering kind. Good Lord, and here she was, newly married to Lamberhurst by the rottenest stroke of luck, a man, as she had discovered so suddenly, who was not the one for her. A most unfortunate lap too late. And then he swung his thoughts to Lamberhurst, who was conducting a persistent monologue in order to disguise his anger and amazement at the extraordinary turn of affairs. Lamberhurst . . . Lamberhurst. He would be hanged if he could remember what was hanging to that name!

Before very long the dissertation ended and then Harewood caught the ball and batted it about. He talked about the country and the weather, golf and the state of the greens. And while he talked he studied the restless working of Lamberhurst's mouth—a sensual, selfish and not over-scrupulous mouth. It was evident that in spite of his rigid stoicism he was chewing the bitter cud. His thick eyelashes flicked rapidly as though he were trying to focus upon a method of action through a film of rage. He ran in a comment from time to time, said "I see," or "Quite," but it was plain to Harewood that the brain of the man who had been locked out of his wife's room was running at full speed. His pulse quickened. It was shown by the beat of his foot. And as he came nearer and nearer to a decision the veins on his temples swelled. Harewood could see that everything in this man's nature revolted against Diana's unexpected rebellion. He was the man who drove and, by Jove, he would not have the wheel taken out of his hand.

Just as he was about to get up, march upstairs and batter at the door, he bent forward to throw the end of his cigarette into the embers of the fire, so that his profile was outlined against the faint flicker of almost burnt-out logs.

Dug-out! A pail with holes in it in which was burning a handful of wet sticks. A night in March, 1918. The beginning of the great backward movement of the Allied Armies in France. . . . No wonder there was something in that profile to stir the memory of an offensive incident in Harewood's mind.

Lamberhurst rose, finished his drink and turned his eyes to the staircase. "Good night," he said. "Thank you. If ever I can do anything for you, let me know."

Harewood pointed to the chair in which Lamberhurst had been sitting. He said, "You can do something for me now. You can respect your wife's desire to be alone to-night."

At which Lamberhurst whipped round with a rather nasty look. "What the devil's that got to do with you?" he asked.

Harewood was perfectly cool. He held an excellent hand of trumps. "It has a good deal to do with me. First of all your wife's a friend of mine, and secondly you will disturb the nice old lady who runs this cottage if you make a noise outside the spare room door. Good reasons both, I think."

"I'm afraid I don't agree with you," said Lamberhurst. He took a step towards the staircase.

"One second," said Harewood. "Do you remember being sent to me with a chit from Colonel Summers one filthy night in March, '18?"

Lamberhurst shot a quick look at his host. "No," he said. "I don't."

"No? All right. Then let me see if I can't refresh your memory. It was pretty quiet when you came over, and after you had delivered the chit and were waiting for my answer you squatted over a bit of a fire that was burning in a pail. I had been trying to cook some tea. I wrote out my report to the Colonel, you took it and disappeared. About five minutes after you were gone the Germans tried to spot my battery, which I persisted in making as uncomfortable as I could. They were a little out in their calculations and their barrage was laid a hundred yards behind. I held my fire while this went on. My answer never reached the Colonel, although you reported the following morning. If my report had been delivered that night several of my officers and half my men might still have been alive. It was not until after the Armistice that I heard from Colonel Summers that you gave out that you hadn't been able to find me, had lost your way, been held up by the barrage, and had only been able to get back by an amazing piece of luck."

"A cursed lie," said Lamberhurst, adding quickly, "you're mixing me up with someone else."

Harewood went to his desk, which stood between the windows, opened a drawer and brought out a silver cigarette-case on which there was engraved a crest. "At any rate," he said, "the officer who delivered the chit that night left this thing on the ground. Oddly enough, I see that the crest on your signet ring is exactly the same as the one that's cut on this—a mailed hand grasping a dagger. Motto: *Vultus in hostem*. Take a look." He held out the case to the man, who would have been white to the gills but for the tan on his face. "If you're keen about mementos," he added, "you may like to add this to your collection."

Lamberhurst took it. He had nothing to say just then. And so there were several moments of the profoundest silence in that delightful sitting-room. The night was fast asleep. There was not even the faintest breeze among the leaves to disturb the exquisite peace.

"All the same, I don't see what all this has got to do with

the case in point," said Lamberhurst finally. "It doesn't give you the slightest right to order me about or control my actions."

"Don't you think so?"

"I certainly do not."

"Well, let me show you how I think it does. You belong, I take it, to some of the senior clubs. A letter from me to the various committees setting out what I've just told you would result, of course, in your name being removed from the lists of members. I think, therefore, that you had better remain where you are." He pointed to the chair.

Lamberhurst looked from the chair to the grave, strong face of the Major whose name had frequently stood out in fiery letters in some of the silent moments of his life. If he had been honest then he would have confessed his never-to-be-forgotten shame. He was not a coward or a weakling, and except for this incident his record during the War had been above reproach. His nerves had broken during that ugly night, and since then his conscience had made him pay a heavy price for his temporary collapse.

"All right," he said, "you've got me. I'll leave the girl alone. But if it's all the same to you, I'll grope my way down the steps again and sit in the car."

"Just as you like," said Harewood. "Take some cigarettes. If an old trench coat is any good to you . . ."

Lamberhurst shook his head. "Good-bye," he said abruptly.

On the way to the door he picked up his cap and his suitcase, went out on to the terrace and disappeared.

With a feeling of immense relief Harewood followed him out, listened to his retreating footsteps and heard the click of the gate. Then he turned and looked up at the spare room window. It was open; the room was in darkness, but he could just make out the outline of a small bobbed head.

"Harry told me you were a man who could be relied on," said Diana. "I'm looking forward to eggs and bacon in the morning. Many thanks. Good night."

Harewood lost more than an hour's sleep. His brain was full of questions when he returned to bed. Why had this young thing married a man like Lamberhurst? Surely she must have known him long enough to discover that behind his attractive mask there was a rampant ego.

Were Lord and Lady Woodstock too fed up with the independence of the younger generation to take any interest in the marriage of their youngest daughter? Where was Harry, whose great affection for his little sister was no mere pose? Had this girl allowed herself to be rushed into a secret marriage, carried away by a wave of youthful romance? There was something very difficult to understand in this affair. Lamberhurst was, of course, a gentleman in the usual acceptation of the term. He had money, was probably in the best of the hunting sets and the rest of it. He was, however, well into the thirties. The most cursory knowledge of his character must have shown that he was a despot and in no way suited to run comfortably in double harness with a girl who had made her entrance into life at the moment when youth was at the prow. Over and over again he asked himself what it was that Lamberhurst had said, either on the road or in the sitting-room, immediately after the rescue, to bring about so sudden a revulsion of Diana's feelings. He got no nearer to a solution of the puzzle, and gave it up. The only thing that was quite plain to him was the fact that the girl whose acquaintance he had made in her brother's letters during the last lap of the War was even more charming than he had imagined her to be. And this was the thought that went into his dreams.

Called at half-past seven the following morning, according to his usual Saturday plan, the first thing that he did was to go down the steps to the lane and along the lane to the road. The Lamberhurst car had gone. The man whose motto was *Vultus in hostem* must have telephoned from the Black Bull to the mechanic in Kingstone Green very early in the morning. Had he driven back to London or gone to the nearest town to wait until a late hour before returning to claim his wife? Whatever he had said to make her call him a liar, he had a perfect right to do that.

He found Diana in the sitting-room looking as fresh as paint. The eggs and bacon were on the table, with coffee and toast. She received him with a wave of the hand and a rather mischievous smile. "Good morning, Major Harewood," she said. "Has he driven away as I said he would?"

"Yes," said Harewood. "How soon do you suppose he'll come back for you?"

She laughed. "Oh, there's not the slightest chance of his

coming back," she said. "How do you like your coffee? Half and half?"

"Please."

"I've been dreaming about eggs and bacon and I'm as hungry as a wolf. By the way, I've made the acquaintance of your old lady. She's a darling. She gasped at the sight of me. Shall I see your sister before I leave?"

Harewood handed her the butter. "I hope you'll see her many times over the week-end. I can see no earthly reason why you should leave until Monday morning. And then I'll take you to town."

"I hoped you would ask me to stay. I said that merely to fish for an invitation."

"Do you play golf?"

"Does a duck swim?"

"Splendid. You can use my sister's clubs." Two and a half rounds a day is the order of things here."

"That suits me," she said.

"And on Monday you . . . you rejoin your husband?"

She put two lumps of sugar into her coffee, looked at him with a still more mischievous smile, and threw a metaphorical bomb into the middle of the breakfast-table that blew it to smithereens.

"Yes, but, you see, he's not my husband."

"He's not your . . ."

"No. I've been saving that little surprise. I didn't really intend to spring it until you had finished breakfast. I thought you would be stronger then."

Harewood was aghast. "I'll be hanged if I know what you mean."

"Why not? It's perfectly simple," she said. "As you will be able to judge by this incident, I am a full-blown modernist; and as I can see from your expression that you're one of the old-fashioned brigade to which my father belongs, let me explain that a modernist is a person who doesn't believe in marriage."

"Who doesn't believe in marriage . . .?"

"To me and all my gang it's a completely outworn institution, a back number, a stuffed Victorian canary under a dusty enclosure of glass. All the same, of course, we're human and so we fall in love—or imagine that we do. I imagined that I was in love with George Lamberhurst and



we were on our way to France. I suppose he told you that. It was to be my first great breakaway—what the pioneers of our movement call leading one's own life without regard for old and dreary conventions. But, you see, as soon as it came to a showdown George lacked courage and hedged; and by passing me off as his wife—a word we don't allow—ruined the thing at the start. I detest a liar, as you heard me say, and so this is where it ends."

Harewood's breakfast grew cold, though not so cold as his spine. He was struck by an icy chill as he listened to the creed of this child, this fearless, foolish girl. He wondered what his comment would have been if he were her brother, or the man who loved her, or the friend of such a man. And although as a matter of fact he felt remarkably like all three, he reminded himself that at the moment he was nothing more than a friend of her brother, her host.

"Is there no clause in your modernist creed," he asked, keeping himself under control, "that points to the advisability of finding out what sort of a man he is to whom you hand yourselves?"

She had rather expected sarcasm. "I've not heard of it," she said. "Excellent marmalade, this."

"Um," said Harewood, quoting from a statement made by a professor who was very much worried as to the future of the world, "there's a very dangerous streak of lunacy about the modern girl." To which he added, on his own responsibility, "Spanking would probably cure her better than anything else."

There was a ripple of laughter. "A truly Woodstockian remark. How often I've heard it at home."

"I'm surprised at that." He was angry. In fact he was filled with a boiling indignation. The idea that any well-bred girl, and especially this one, about whom he had built a very tender grotto, should bolt in cold blood with any man who took her fancy, under the belief that she was being frightfully clever and frightfully up to date, made him want to explode.

"Like my dear old father," she said, as cool and green as a cucumber, "you fail to grasp the point. The younger generation is kicking over the traces all along the line. It's the aftermath of the War.

"Running amuck, in fact." He pushed back his chair

and got up. He couldn't stand any more of such headlines without loading and lighting a pipe.

It was, however, as he could see, rather worse than useless to argue, to browbeat, and to come out with a series of sensible remarks which would only have the effect of focusing the limelight upon this child, of making her see herself not as a ridiculous and tragic figure, but as a heroine, a Joan of Arc.

So holding himself in he waited until she had finished her breakfast, and then, handing a cigarette, piled all the cushions in the corner of one of the settles and led her to it as though she were a middle-aged woman of the world.

He spoke with bantering sarcasm. "You may not know it, but your modernism is a little out of date. All that tosh about free love, leading your own life and treating the conventions as though they were ninepins belongs to the old days of militant suffragists. It's Adelphi Terrace stuff, the vintage of nineteen-eight. It belongs essentially to the period of paper curlers, long and frowsy skirts, and rather ugly faces. It's the rank old-fashioned stuff that used to be talked by the young art students in Chelsea who thought that cubism was a new religion. It was swept away by the War."

Diana had ceased to smoke. There was amazement in her eyes. Her father and mother and other conventional people had never said those things.

Harewood could see that he was on the right track. Ridicule and satire, as he had discovered before, were much more effective weapons in dealing with youth than indignation and horror. "To take your case for a moment," he said, pretending to be greatly amused, "how do you suppose that you and George Lamberhurst could have made a tour in France if he had not lied to the hotels as he lied to me and passed you off as his wife? You wouldn't have been taken in. Free love is not permitted even in France without a blanket of camouflage. You should have chosen Zululand or have been unconventionally conventional and quite prepared to be called a liar yourself. Did you ever think of that?"

She shook her head. How terribly young she was.

"To be perfectly serious for a moment," said Harewood, "the gang with whom you've been consorting have obviously been sitting with their faces to the wall. Much water has

passed under the bridges since they wrote their creed. The modernist, as a matter of fact, of whom I happen to be one, has suddenly discovered that marriage is quite the latest thing and that the little gold ring is so frightfully new as to come under the heading of futurism. But, of course, there's something to go with that which seems to have been omitted since the days of good Queen Anne. You will be amazed to hear it's love."

He left her sitting bolt upright and went into the garden. He hoped that she felt a fool. He hoped that during the whole of that day and the next one she would think the dreadful episode over and emerge with a grain of sense. Perhaps it was the sun and the scent of his flowers, the cheerful song of the birds, the glorious and unconquerable sanity of nature that gave him optimism. The subject, at any rate, was never discussed again. With golf and cheerful meals, the presence of a new moon, laughter, tobacco, the quaint remarks of the exemplary old lady, the subtle helpfulness of Harewood's sister, the week-end passed most pleasantly and all too soon. And when, on Monday morning, Harewood took his guest to the train and from the train to the doorstep of Lord Woodstock's London house, optimism was still with him and something else besides. And that was hope.

He took her hand and held it. "Are you by any chance doing anything on Friday afternoon?"

Diana thought for a moment with her head cocked on one side.

"Well," she said, "I did think of hiring a car and breaking down in your lane."

"A corking idea," he said. "Better still, why not let me fetch you about 5.30 so that we can catch the 6.1?"

"All right," she said. "I find that I'm rather fond of trains." She laughed and added, "Since cars came in one's forgotten how modern they really are, you know."

He kissed her hand. He jolly nearly kissed her lips. He was a man of great control. "God bless your sense of humour," he said.

"God bless yours," said she.

H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

*The Girl at the Gate*

H. de Vere Stacpoole practised for a time as a doctor, and before taking to literature travelled much, assisting in several deep-sea expeditions. He has written many charming romances of the South Sea islands, the most popular of which is *The Blue Lagoon*.



## THE GIRL AT THE GATE

FROM the little hill of Bon Bec over the tree-tops of the deep, surrounding woods, one can see to the north-west the spires of Tours, looking on a warm summer afternoon for all the world like the spires of some enchanted city amidst the silence and the blueness and the haze.

Here you are within earshot of the bells of Viroflay, the Cher shows a diamond sparkle through the trees of the eastern woods, and were you to travel twenty miles away to that hilltop showing above the glades of Hauteville, you would see in flashes of silver the Loire, broad as when it passed Orleans, and hinting nothing of its humble source in the deep, dim heart of the Cevennes.

The hill of Bon Bec has only four trees upon it, three young oaks and a huge, old, great-grandfather oak, counting its age by centuries, hollow as a cave, yet green in spring.

The Revolution, which changed so many things, changed little in the woods of Viroflay; Jean Caboche, for instance, who cut wood and carted it to the Château de Nevers, who doctored trees, snared rabbits, and set night lines in the Cher, did exactly as his father and grandfather and great-grandfather had done before him; had you traced his pedigree, you would have found it as long as the Loire and coming from as dim a source—the woods, and had you met him by chance in one of the glades, you would have been struck by something about the man that marked him apart from the ordinary peasant; and had you met his daughter Marie, and spoken to her, you would have been struck by the same something feminized, and therefore intensified.

The pretty, dark-haired girl would have caught your fancy by her grace and graciousness, a personal charm indefinable and individual as the grace and perfume of the violet.

Old Jean was a character of the countryside, one of those men who disregard class distinction and yet are not in the

least offensive ; he would speak to a nobleman just as familiarly as to a fellow woodman, and when the President of the Republic had once stopped by chance at the Inn of Viroflay, Jean, who was drunk, yet carrying his liquor like a gentleman, had a long conversation with the first magistrate of the land, for whom Viroflay for ever after bore association with "the splendid old peasant."

There was a tradition in the family of the Caboches that once, away in that dim and confused past called History, a king had cast his eyes upon some ancestress whose very name was forgotten. It was no more than a woodland echo, this tradition ; caught from generation to generation ; now scarcely even an echo, just a hint sometimes uttered by Jean in his cups.

"Ah, yes, you may talk, but there are some people who could boast, if they would——"

Marie, on a fine afternoon, would take her knitting and leading Margot, the goat, by her cord, tether her close to the great oak-tree on the hill of Bon Bec, and sitting in the shade of the leaves with the prospect of all Touraine before her, knit away at the eternal grey stockings which she sold each month to old Bazin, of Bourges.

She would talk to Margot as she worked, and sometimes she would sing to herself old songs of Touraine, songs never printed in a book or published by a publisher, yet perdurable as the hills and the rivers.

To-day, one of those autumn days that have in them a touch of spring, Marie had taken her seat with her back against the oak ; Margot, securely tethered, was cropping the grass, and a long grey stocking in the girl's lap was nearing completion. It was the last of two dozen, and Bazin was due to call on the morrow in the course of his monthly round.

The Parisians who owned the Château of Viroflay had been hunting all the morning in the woods. They were strange people in her eyes, these Parisians, rich beyond all dreams of riches (they were the Nadars who owned the great soap factory at Issy), giving free reign to a hundred fantastical ideas, masked balls and so forth, and even freeing foxes in the woods for the purpose of chasing them. Quite

mad, and somehow repellent to the little stocking-worker, who protruded her short upper lip as, again, closer this time, came the sound of the horn. She dropped her knitting on her lap and searched the glades with her eyes. The hunters were invisible. Then, forgetting them, she let her eyes wander away over the autumn-touched leaves of the forest; away and away beyond the groves of beech and the great green islands of oak, and the swelling domes of foliage around Hauteville, and the far dream of country, lovely in the distance, and leading to the vision of Tours.

As she gazed, held by the vision, and forgetting Margot, her knitting, herself, and the world, a hail from below made her turn her eyes.

A horseman was riding up the hill from the woods, a man heavily built, astride of a horse deep-chested and powerful; a man with a grizzled beard, and with such a great, imperious, jovial-looking face that Marie, fascinated by it, almost forgot to be surprised at his dress.

For he was dressed in doublet and trunk hose, and wore an eagle's feather in his velvet hat, leather gauntlets on his hands and a gold chain about his neck.

And he came up the hill as if the whole world belonged to him; free and airy and gracious, his every movement so full of ease and the dignity of strength that it was a pleasure to watch him.

"Ho, ho, my pretty one! The Château of Viroflay, the Château of Viroflay; can you direct me to the Château of Viroflay, or the way to it, which I have lost in your mazy woods."

"Oh, monsieur," cried the girl, suddenly starting to her feet and pointing, "it lies over there, and if you look you can just see the turrets above those trees, 'tis but a very short way."

The gentleman slipped from his horse, and, shading his eyes, looked in the direction in which she was pointing.

"Ay, 'tis there from here, but when one is trapped in that maze of trees, *pardieu*, where is it?" He laughed jovially, took the whole sweep of country with a glance of his eye, and then said, "Come, you can show me the way."

"With pleasure, monsieur."

"And the goat?" said the big man, who had a mind, it seems, for little things as well as great.



"Oh, monsieur, Margot will wait for me, if for no other reason than because she is tethered."

"Forward, then," said he, laughing, and away they marched down hill, he leading the great horse, with the bridle through his arm, she at his side.

She felt elated. His fantastic dress scarcely gave her a thought, it seemed part of his overwhelming personality. Without doubt he was a very great noble, a foreigner, perhaps, for he spoke with a trace of a strange accent, and sometimes used unfamiliar words. She did not know that the thing foreign to her in his speech was a trace of the accent of Bearne, just a touch, yet poignant as the pine-reek of the mountains. He talked to her as they went, and sometimes he seemed to forget her, or rather his mind seemed occupied with other things, for he was too great and kindly and courtly to let you imagine for a moment that you were out of his purview, even though for the moment you might not be occupying the centre of the stage.

The Château of Viroflay lay a league from the hill of Bon Bec, and the path lay through the pleasantest woods in the world. The Parisians might improve the Château, which dated from before the time of Charles the Ninth, but the woods were still the woods that sheltered the boar that feared the arquebus; such woods one might fancy haunted by other things than the voices of birds, especially on a day like this, filled with the spirit of autumn, yet touched by the spirit of spring and the sunshine that struck through the twilight of the glades and filled the paths with shafts of gold and dancing shadows.

They passed open spaces, green swards laid out like carpets for the rabbits to show their soft forms against, and they passed through deep copses, where the nuts were ready for picking; they took their way through a maze of paths, led by the unerring eye of Marie, and then they reached a little gate, as old as the Château of Viroflay itself.

It was the gate of the rose-garden of Viroflay, where the roses had bloomed for four hundred summers, filling the glades of the forest all about with their perfume, and standing at the gate, you were between the sounds of the forest and the garden, the voice of the chestnut-tree and the voice of the fountain.

"Ah!" cried Marie, "I had forgotten, monsieur, you have

your horse with you, and he cannot pass through the garden."

Her companion laughed, and tethered the horse to one of the gateposts.

"He will wait here and I will send for him—and how old are you, *chérie*?"

He raised her chin with his finger and looked at her face as though he were looking at her for the first time.

"I am sixteen, monsieur."

"A good age, a good age," sighed the magnificent one; "and your name, *petite*?"

"Marie, monsieur."

"Only Marie?"

"Marie Caboche, monsieur."

"Marie Caboche—well, I will call thee 'Flower of the Forest.'" He stooped and kissed her on the forehead. Then, laughing, he fumbled at a purse attached to his belt. "And now for something by which you may remember me," said he.

"Oh, monsieur!" cried Marie, with a sudden bravery she had never guessed in herself. "I do not want money to remember you by—I shall never forget you—" And she blushed all over her face as she said the words, and her eyes filled with tears and her heart beat with a feeling that astonished and abashed her, so that she would have run away and hidden amidst the trees, only that she lacked the power.

He had opened the purse, only to find one single small silver coin in it, and he was laughing at this discovery, but her words checked his laughter. He closed the purse, sighed, took her little hand, placed the coin in it, and then he forgot to release the hand.

"You will remember me?"

"Always, monsieur."

"Ah, monsieur, monsieur!" grumbled he; "is it my grizzled beard that makes you utter that odious word? Now, if I were sixteen—Oh, the good age!—I wager you and I would be something better than monsieur and mademoiselle one to the other. *Ventre St. Gris!*" he suddenly burst out, his eager, boyish and impetuous nature casting age aside, "my name is Henri—come, now, call me by my name!"

"H—H—Henri," murmured Marie, casting her eyes on the ground and then casting her eyes right up in his face,

and then casting them down again slowly, just as slowly and as regretfully as the movement of her little hand, now trying to disengage itself from his.

Then he spoke to her again.

"Marie."

The one word spoken as he spoke it made her tremble like a tree shaken by the wind.

Then she was running away, back along the path, alone, towards the hill of Bon Bec.

"Meet me to-night here at the gate when the moon rises."

The words rang in her ears, she was no longer little Marie, terror and joy ran one on each side of her.

Then as she ran she tripped on a tree-root, fell—and awoke. The unfinished stocking was still in her lap; Margot was cropping the grass and the whole world of Touraine lay before her in the sunlight.

The shadows of the oak-leaves had not shifted the tenth of an inch, yet her dream, so it seemed to her, had lasted an hour.

Ah, what a dream! It had all seemed so real, she knew him so well—what a dream to vanish like that, shrivel away to nothing and leave her alone with Loneliness.

She searched the glades with her eyes and the hill up which he had ridden on the brave, strong horse, she saw again his face, grand, jovial, gracious— It *could* not be a dream, it was far, far too real, and he, how could she have pictured a figure absolutely unlike all things she had ever seen?

Yet it was a dream. The wind told her that; the north-west wind of autumn shaking the leaves above her mournfully, like a voice from the Past.

"*Chérie*, you will never forget me?—but it is a dream—all life is a dream."

She sighed and rose, gathering up her knitting, and as she rose she noticed on the ground a little black disc on which her hand had been resting. She picked it up. It was a coin, but so worn and blackened by the years that the inscription and face on it were scarcely visible.

Children came here to play often, and grubbing among the roots of the oak they had probably unearthed this thing. She examined it attentively.

The trace of a bearded chin, of an imperious and powerful nose, the characters—"ri iv"—that was all there was left by Time, the eater of things.

She placed it in the work-bag with her knitting, and, taking Margot by the cord, led her down the hill and home.

Her father had not yet returned and she set about preparing supper for him, then she sat waiting for him, drawing her stool close to the fire and gazing at the burning sticks. The cottage was so poor that a tall man had to enter it stooping, but now in the dusk, the firelight, flickering and fitful, touched the old bureau which Bazin of Bourges had so often tried to buy and the carved oak chest for which he had offered Jean Caboche five hundred francs; it touched a beam of the ceiling and Marie's face, leaving the poverty and mean things to the shadows.

Jean Caboche returned, and when he had finished his supper and fallen asleep in his chair Marie rose, glanced at him, and left the cottage, closing the door behind her. As she closed it she laughed to herself as one laughs when contemplating some pleasant stupidity—then she started for the forest. The moon was already paling the sky, and in another half-hour or so it would be over the trees and shining on the rose-garden of Viroflay. The woods were dark, but she was a woodman's daughter; the paths were intricate, but she could find her way blindfolded and the call was ringing in her ears. It was absurd—what can be more absurd than to attempt to follow out a dream in real life? But no one would know of her foolishness, and there would be no one to laugh at it but herself.

The woods, when the eyes became accustomed to them, were filled by a vague gloaming born of the last of the sunset, the first of the stars, and the first of the moon. Then, as she went, the light became stronger and she knew that the moon was chasing her.

Would she be late?

The folly of the thought scarcely struck her. With all the gravity of a child playing some game of make-believe, she paused and glanced behind her at the barred and broken disc of silver just visible among the branches; the great moon of autumn, floating upwards, and flooding the country with her light. Rabbits rustled away from the path, and a nightjar cried from the foliage on the left, and down a glade

where the moon was now frankly gazing Marie saw a white owl taking its soundless flight.

It is at this hour and under these circumstances that a forest discloses the merest glimpses of its heart. By day you see its beauty and its dreams, but by moonlight something of the secret of this, the first house that man ever knew.

In May the place would be ringing with the voices of nightingales, but to-night it was silent, except for the occasional crying of the nightjar and the sound of the wind pressing gently upon the leaves.

She passed glades and copses familiar to her by daylight, but strange by the light of the moon. At last she reached the gate.

No one.

She had not expected to meet anyone, yet she was disappointed. Make-believe has its griefs as well as its pleasures.

She stood for a moment looking into the garden. In her dream the roses had been in full summer bloom, and the air fragrant with their perfume; to-night there were no summer roses here, only a few of the roses of autumn.

And now as she stood clasping the ironwork of the gate, and for the first time in her life, she was touched by that spirit so well-known to some of us—Ghostly Remembrance.

The whole situation was familiar to her, she had done just this thing and stood at this gate as she stood now, and waited for him as she was waiting now, in some time—oh! immeasurably remote—and she had heard the wind in the trees as she heard it now, and the splash of the fountains, and his footstep—for a footstep, heavy and assured, was sounding on the garden-path, and Marie, thrilled, trembling, half-dazed, slipped away from the gate and hiding in the shadows of the trees, watched, listened, waited, hand on heart, scarcely daring to look, yet daring.

The form of a big man disclosed itself in the moonlight, dressed, for Marie, even more fantastically than the form in her dream.

But it was not he whom she sought. It was M. Nadar, attired in the funereal black of modern evening clothes, and above the great white shirt-front the face of the bourgeois shone in the moonlight.

M. Nadar had wandered through the garden—a strange

thing to be attracted out by the moon—and, smoking his cigar, had wandered down to the gate to look at his forest.

Not daring to move, she watched the corpulent figure that seemed the very incarnation of the Present, till it turned away through the garden, where the summer roses once bloomed for Charles and Henri Quatre as summer roses will never bloom again.

That was on the night of October 2nd, 1883. Marie has never married, by chance, perhaps, or by disinclination, or by reason of the wind of the forest and its voice so filled with the voice of the past.

"*Chérie*, you will never forget me—but it is a dream – all life is a dream."



WALTER DE LA MARE  
*At First Sight*

Walter de la Mare originally made his name as a poet (his *Songs of Childhood* and *Peacock Pie* contain some of the most delightful lyrics in the language) but he has also written several novels and a large number of short stories in a vein of delicate fantasy which is inimitable.





## AT FIRST SIGHT

AT first sight any passer-by chancing to notice the grey-flannelled figure of the young man who was now making his way round the eastern horn of Galloway Crescent, would have assumed that he was blind. But this was not so. It is true the slender cane he carried in his hand was poised exploringly in front of him as he stepped quietly on, but then he never tapped with it; and though his eyes were hidden from view beneath a green silk shade attached to his head under his hat, an occasional slight sidelong movement of that head suggested that he was making at least *some* rudimentary use of them.

There was a peculiar grace in his movements, too, such as any wild but timid creature shows even when kept in a cage, and an almost absurd fastidiousness was manifest in his clothes. And though—in part, possibly, because this hideous green shade of his had always shielded his face from the furies of a London sun—his features were unusually pale, there was nothing positively effeminate in his looks. Wild things, after all, however timid, are not necessarily of the weaker sex.

Residents in Galloway Crescent were seldom visible at their windows. To many of them, none the less, Cecil must long since have become a familiar figure since the pavement between their iron balconies and their basements was part of his daily constitutional. Where old Professor Smith lived indeed, at No. 24—an old gentleman so profoundly interested in Persian literature that he had no need of “the time”—the neat parlour-maid sometimes actually set her pantry clock by this young man. Busy at her dusting, her dark eye would glance down from the Professor’s first-floor drawing-room—to which she was all but the sole visitor—and would descry Cecil gently forging his way along with a motion like that of a yacht on a halcyon sea.

"Why, there's that young Mr. Jennings!" she would exclaim to herself, with a thrill in her mind, and would at once run off downstairs to look at the clock to see if its hands—as they usually did—actually pointed to ten minutes past eleven.

On this particular morning, however, Cecil was at least a quarter of an hour before his time; and to judge from his progress, a stiffer breeze than usual was cat's-pawing his sea. On approaching the Crescent's westerly horn, however, his footsteps began to lag. And now he seemed to be taking the liveliest possible interest in the outskirts of the scene which his shade and his affliction enabled him to command.

His slightly protruding dark-blue eyes were fixed on the pavement as if in eager search of something. They were. What indeed for days past his mind had been positively bent on was the hope of discovering—not its fellow—but the *owner* of the grey suède glove that now lay safely tucked away in the side pocket of his jacket. That hope was rapidly waning—to leave him not only restless but forlorn. This morning he was little more than pursuing its shadow, as one may pursue the vanishing memories of a happy dream.

In a monotonous life even the smallest excitement seems to have dropped clean out of the blue. And since Cecil's day-by-day had for years been as regular and punctual as Professor Smith's parlour-maid's pantry clock, to want anything badly was a novel and exciting experience. He was still in his early twenties, and in part because of his affliction, in part because of a natural shyness, he was still under the unrelaxing care of a kind of step-grandmother, Mrs. le Mercier—a lady of ample means if not always of entirely transparent ends.

Cecil also had money of his own. Comfort lapped him in; every wish—within reason—could be gratified. There was only this one comparatively slight ocular disability. He might have been a cripple, or an imbecile, or a man of genius, or gravel-blind; and even then not always unhappy. But nothing so tragic as that. He was merely incapable of looking *up*. From his earliest infancy this curious and baffling derangement of his eyes had kept whatever attention he had to give fixed almost exclusively on the ground. By thrusting back his head a little he could, it is true, increase

his optical range. But any effort of this kind was severe, and was apt to cause him excruciating pain. And Mrs. le Mercier—"Grummumma," as he called her—steadily set her face against these experiments. She counselled patience and moderation—to any extreme.

"I cannot bear the distress of it," she would cry, when Cecil falteringly groped upwards with his head. And though, naturally, she had spent a good deal of money to get expert advice, she had never given up hope that time which heals all things might alleviate this, and had never been in favour of drastic measures. She hated the notion of plaguing the poor dear boy, and even of reminding him more often than was necessary to his well-being that he was different from other young men.

"After all," she would sometimes confide in her friends, "so long as dear Cecil is all right in *himself*, that is all that really matters. There is nothing, thank God, *abnormal* in any way, and fine frenzies, I am thankful to say, are not Cecil's forte. That is my conviction. So long as he is all right in *himself*, we must just make the best we can of his little handicap." Still, even Grummumma occasionally had her doubts; and could be peevish when incommoded.

Standing in his shade in the middle of the luxurious, almost lush, French carpet laid all over Mrs. le Mercier's drawing-room, and soundlessly rotating on his heels, Cecil could see nothing beyond a circle of a circumference of about nine or ten feet. By mounting up on to a chair he could of course extend his survey. Still, all human venture is only *human* venture. And at no time in his life had Cecil ever been tempted to become an explorer or a pioneer. He was as normal in that respect as most people. And his grandmother, in the kindness of the heart that lay somewhere within her ample bosom, had, if anything, tended to restrict his range. Whims of a contrary kind she would greet with indulgent, if not copious amusement. And as time went on—though it seemed powerless to add anything more suggestive of age than "presence" to her general effect—that amusement grew ever more pronounced.

Inspired one April morning in his seventeenth year by a bright idea, Cecil had been discovered kneeling, hairbrush in hand, busily knocking into his bedroom wall—a foot or so above the wainscot—a tintack or two. Unframed photo

graphs of the "old masters" lay scattered on the floor around him.

"You know how I enjoy looking at them, as much as I *can* look at them," he had explained to Grummumma, archly, surveying him from the doorway. "I wanted just to see if—well, you see, at *this* height. . . ."

"And Grummumma doesn't blame her dear boy," she had replied in that deep rich voice of hers. "It's the happiest of thoughts! None the less, I am perfectly certain, Cecil, you didn't want any one—one of the maids, say—who happened to be passing your door to die of laughing. You can't imagine how absurd the effect is—even to *me*. No, Cecil, we don't want that." And Cecil had at once concurred.

It may or may not be true that *children* in general enjoy a far more comprehensive view of life than their elders are apt to surmise. It was true, anyhow, of Cecil: and this in spite of his poor eyes. His mother, indeed, in his quite early days, had realized this, and had always made a point of engaging tall, strapping nursemaids, to the end that the little man, while at least *she* had any say in the matter, should see as much of the world as possible.

Fortunately, too, in this respect, she had not died until fully six months after he had been breeched, when to be carried about at all, even by the Queen of Brobdingnag herself, would have been a little humiliating. He had *once* enjoyed "the larger view"; that was the point.

On the other hand, all children, however freely they may twist their big heads on their small bodies, are accustomed to being close to the ground, which may in part account for the fact that as they grow older they are apt to have a rather narrow outlook. Cecil, having as an infant spent most of his waking hours in high chairs and in the arms of these nursery grenadiers, became suddenly *shorter*, so to speak, as soon as his mother died; and Grummumma was not one to gainsay the obvious.

But then again, mere custom, while it may blunt and dull the mind, can also bless it with almost incredible funds of patience and endurance. And of an uncomplaining household—consisting of himself, Mrs. le Mercier, an occasional grand-niece, three servants, a gardener, his boy, and a kind of crippled pensioner who did the boots and other odd and

dirty jobs—Cecil was the most uncomplaining member. It was to outward appearance a singularly placid household. The servants kept their audibility to their own quarters; Eirene, Grummumma's grand-niece, was unusually discreet for a young woman of her age; Cecil was no conversationalist; and Mrs. le Mercier, though she had a temper, very rarely showed or lost it. Concealed and kept, it was, if anything, more intimidating. Even at its extreme, it dressed itself up in the mantle of a mute, peculiar, ferocious scorn.

Any kind of incompetence in any home cannot but be a burden, however philosophically that burden may be borne. The moment it threatened to become unbearable in hers, Grummumma became a dowager Mrs. Christian, while remaining Mrs. Worldly-Wisewoman in her methods of correcting it. She could be liberal, even magnanimous to anyone really dependent on her, and she never humiliated the humble. Her husband, after a long tedious illness, had, as it were, suddenly dropped out of her life. This was years ago. She thought of him none the less kindly and even sentimentally, whenever she did think of him, because it had been a release to them both.

She had never had any children, and every scrap of maternal instinct she possessed was squandered on Cecil. He was hers "for keeps". "He is 'my young man'," she had more than once fondly sighed of him over her tea-table. "If anything happened to him . . ." a momentary frumpishness of utter dejection would settle over her copious figure; one plump ringed hand resting on the Indian tea-tray beside her while she followed up the sentence in the silence of her mind.

All this was none the less a little curious, for Mrs. le Mercier couldn't endure in any human being the slightest deviation from the normal. At sight of a humpback her eyes rolled in her head. She could be charitable—but only from a distance. As a girl she had been made to read the life of St. Francis. It had disgusted her. This experience—and similar compulsions—had tainted for her the very sight of a serious book. Even the marks in a strange face of poverty or sickness filled her with dismay—"froze her up."

"I know it, my dear," she had once confided in a friend, "I am at the mercy of horrors." And there came with the

words such a look of helplessness into her bold and formidable face that even cruelty itself would have hesitated to set to work on such a victim.

It may have been in order to spare her own feelings, then, that though she had never desisted in her efforts to better poor Cecil's eyes, she had steadily opposed anything in the nature of an operation. Physicians and specialists from every country in Europe had been consulted, turn and turn about, and had expressed their views at large when out of hearing of their subject. For Cecil, this ordeal had almost become a habit. He knew how to avoid being hurt, became an expert in specialists' little ways, and usually feigned to be much more of a mufﬂ even than he looked. And when the specialist was gone, he would settle his silk shade over his eyes and just simply become himself again, whatever that might mean.

"We cannot be downcast," Grummumma would sometimes declare in astonishing contradiction of her habits, "*we cannot* be downcast, my dear boy, provided we know the worst. Face that, and all is well. Not of course that all these *clever* men intend to be optimistic. It's just false hopes that are the bane of most people. The poor hope to be rich, the afflicted hope to be whole, little realizing how much happier they would be if they remained contented with things as they are, and expected them so to stay. After all, Cecil, the ways of Providence are inscrutable."

So Cecil had continued not to look up. On the other hand, there is a metaphorical use of the phrase, and Cecil had been reminded of it at rather frequent intervals. Here Grummumma and he indeed completely parted company. Particularly when Canon Bagshot came not merely to lunch but to "help." When Cecil was a little boy, the Canon used to take him—used indeed to wedge him—between angular knees and talk to him. Being spare, dark and tall, Canon Bagshot looked a more ascetic man even than he actually was. He had done excellent, if rather active, work in the parish, and was one of the few human beings whose company Mrs. le Mercier could enjoy without any symptom on his part of a polite subservience; and no local scheme of betterment was complete without him. Among these schemes, Canon Bagshot had somehow got imbedded in his mind the notion that Cecil might be cured of his physical difficulty if in *spirit*,

so to speak, he could be persuaded or induced or compelled to "look up."

One particular catechism of this kind remained vividly in Cecil's memory, and Grummumma had been present at it, sitting with her back to the window, and drinking it all in. There was a particular large rose of many graduated reds in the beautiful carpet upon which he remembered he had then been standing. Two large bony hands had been holding his elbows, but only the extreme edges of the Canon's dark, wide dented chin were visible as it gently wagged up and down.

"You know well, my dear boy," the voice had assured him, "how much we all have your happiness at heart. And if we urge you to things even a little painful in themselves, it is only for your good. And now I am told you refuse to speak sometimes when you are spoken to. Why is that?"

At that moment Cecil had no wish to refuse to speak, but his mouth was dry, he felt extremely uncomfortable, and what he most wanted to do *was* to look up into Canon Bagshot's face—though only to see if it resembled what was suggested by the tones of his voice. He meant to explain too that it was useless to ask him the same question again and again when he had already answered it. Instead of this, he at last managed to mutter, "I don't want to."

"But then, you see, my dear boy," Canon Bagshot had replied firmly, "it is just those *don't wants* that harass and impede us in life's pilgrimage. It is not what we want or don't want to do, but what we ought to do that matters. Your dear grandmamma wishes only for your *good*. 'Ah,' you may say, 'I can't be like other boys.' And that, of course, in its degree is perfectly true. God's will be done. But it doesn't mean that in many other things you cannot be *better* than other boys, setting them an example which should shame them, knowing what advantages they have, while at the same time you yourself should realize the many, many advantages denied to them which have *not* been denied to you. Do you follow me?"

The Canon's voice, its mere accents, somehow reminded Cecil of an illustration in one of his story books—the picture of an Alpine guide, brass horn to lip, just vanishing round an



incredibly precipitous bluff of snow and rock. It invited one on.

Cecil indeed had in actual fact been a long way in front throughout this speech. He had now to hasten back in order to nod and shake his head. This contradictory gesture was a little instinctive device of his own. If he *had* been able to raise his eyes, he might, with the same end in view, have opened them wider, then shut them.

"Precisely," cried the Canon. "And examples are better than precepts. Are they not? You would hardly believe it, perhaps, but there is a poor old woman living in Fish Street, not a mile from here, who is compelled to lie on her back, day in day out, in one dingy little room into which I should hesitate to take a dog. She knows absolutely nothing of the gentle circumstances that surround *you*. Only one dingy old blanket to cover her; only one window, cracked and grimed, to look out of all day long. And I ask you, is she unhappy?"

She must be very stupid if she is not, had been Cecil's first thought. What he said was, "I hate old women in Fish Street."

"You will please, Cecil," came a voice from Grummum-ma's bow-window, "you will please, when you are addressing Canon Bagshot, leave off these sullen manners. Those who live with you may be accustomed to them; visitors are not. Besides it is *very* irreverent."

"Well, my dear boy," continued the Canon magnanimously, "whatever you may think, you are mistaken. That poor, miserable old woman is as happy as the days are long." The last part of the remark on this bleared winter afternoon was perhaps less appropriate than it seemed on the surface. But Cecil made no comment.

"Now to have to use physical persuasion in your case," the Canon continued, "is the last thing anyone could wish. All that I want you to remember is this: Humility, Trust, Gratitude. Say these words over to yourself night and morning. Say them now. No," the Canon rapidly added, remembering similar adjurations in the past, "say them over when you are alone. For it is not, dear boy, as if we could plead ignorance. We *know* our duty. It is in black and white. 'I must order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters.' What does that mean? Surely, no scowling

looks, no dumb-doggedness. Friends are constantly praying for you ; sympathy is being poured out for your affliction. But though it is your lot in life to be compelled to be unable to face the world boldly, as Christian faced Apollyon, in *spirit* you can, like all of us, at least learn to look up. And I, as one of the humblest of spiritual pastors and masters, if you remain recalcitrant, must find some means of insisting upon your making the attempt. No sullenness, now, no dark clouds ! *What* were our Gentle Three ?—Humility, Trust, Gratitude.”

How odd a paradox. It was this Gentle Three that poor Cecil in later life had most to contend against ; if, at least, there was to be any hope of *his* becoming the Happy Warrior.

But these were far-away days. Sunday by Sunday Cecil had continued to sit beside Mrs. le Mercier in her pew at St. Peter's and St. Paul's. But the Canon's sermons on these occasions were of a more general application. And since they differed as little in form as they did in matter and Cecil knew their trend by heart, much of this edifying half hour was spent in day-dreaming. Here he had an advantage over his neighbours. For not only were the mean decorations of the Corinthian pillar and of the pitch-pine roof over his head, and the utterly dehumanized saints depicted in the stained glass chancel windows—mustard green, blue and crushed strawberry—out of his range, but no one could judge from his downcast eyes on what his attention *was* fixed.

But on the whole his relations with Grummumma were friendly enough, and, when visitors were present, even cordial. Then, indeed, if only in a negative sort of way, he *might* be said to look up to her, though it was difficult to tell exactly to what extent. And partly because he could not help himself and partly because of a maturational indolence, he had just gone his own way—the way within, that is—without saying very much about it and without deliberately setting his will against hers.

Cecil, however, could hardly be said to be thinking of this *auld lang syne* as he gently pushed on round the Crescent this particular sunny morning, one hand clasping the derelict glove in his jacket pocket. Only the faintest nebulous incubus of it hung in his mind. Meanwhile his eyes wandered restlessly and heedlessly over the ground at his feet. He had long been an expert in his own orbit. Quite apart from such manageable

refuse as cigar and cigarette ends, dead matches, hairpins, footprints, pavement weeds, moss, the laying of asphalt, puddles, mud, dogs, cats, pebbles, straw and so on, not to mention the lovely way of the wind in withered leaves or drifting snow—concerning which he was probably the only expert for miles round, he was also a connoisseur of horses' hoofs, boots and shoes, socks and laces, of the nether portion of trouser-legs, and of feminine skirts, shoes and ankles. He was an expert, that is, without in the least being aware of it.

He had long enjoyed the habit, too, of steadily scrutinizing what happened to interest him indoors as well as out. Reading desperately tired his eyes, and so, even apart from the books his Grummumma kept out of his way, his literary range was decidedly narrow. But while he looked and read, he usually thought. He was indeed a master of his own exceedingly small fraction of the complete human range of consciousness—a range fairly considerable in itself and one which of course, if only in the world of matter, is being steadily amplified.

But this fine morning he was anxious, uneasy, and sick at heart. His eyes wandered vacantly, his attention was elsewhere: simply because his one and only desire was to return the rather dingy glove in his pocket to its owner. He just wanted to say, "You will forgive me for intruding, but I picked this up, you see. And you may have missed it, perhaps."

It was never very easy to raise his hat when his Grummumma whispered, "Ssh, Cecil, there's Mrs. Shrub, or Lady Linsey, or Miss Bolsover," mainly because he got so nervous and usually hit with his knuckles the shade over his eyes before his fingers reached the brim above.

But this time he was going to do it very carefully, and then take his leave. It seemed to him a small glove compared with Eirene's, with Mrs. le Mercier's, or even with that of their parlour-maid, Janet, which he had seen by accident hanging beside her skirt (its hand within it), at the area gate but a few weeks ago, after one of her "afternoons out."

This glove was scented, too, though not quite so delicately as would seem to make it impossible for Grummumma to detect it even though it lay in his pocket. Grummumma's gloves were also scented, but rather with herself than with

anything else. He had deduced, too, that this specimen of a glove cannot have been an expensive one. Yet the fact that it had a tiny hole in its first finger only made him the more anxious to return it to its owner. But—his heart had come into his mouth once more—how on earth was he to recognize her unless she happened to be wearing the same blue serge skirt, and the same stockings and shoes as when she had come his way and had gone?

Never had there been such a fool as he was—he knew that well enough. But to be a fool in public is one thing, to be a fool in one's own private soul is another. And that was what he was being now. He was being timid and ashamed simply because there was the faintest possibility that Grummumma might herself be abroad that morning in her soft glacé kid shoes, or that Canon Bagshot might come treading along in his stout parochials, or spry, odious, mincing Miss Bolsover, with her ringing voice and old-fashioned spring-siders. All three of them would realize at once that he was not merely enjoying his morning walk, but hanging about, loafing. They would watch him; their gaze would bore into his back; and by that time it might be—well, too late. That the sun was scorchingly hot and the pavement a continuous glare, with its sharp-cut shadows here and there and its steady, pungent, broiling odour, was, however, a joy rather than a martyrdom.

Cecil had by this time not only turned the corner of the Crescent but was approaching the first row of shops. Their window-blinds hung dazzling in the sunshine, casting delightful shadows. A medley of noises zigzagged across the air. The whole of High Street, he knew, was steadily effervescing with traffic of matutinal gaiety and business. It was odd how one's mind roved to and fro from point to point in memory without once realizing its direction, or what had intervened. He had suddenly become a little boy again, his right hand tenaciously clutching the iron handle of a perambulator, which a plump young nursemaid, named Annie, in a stiff print gown, was pushing in front of her. At the same moment a grocer's assistant had come back to mind, a young man with a voice almost as rich in flavours as the inside of the shop in which he served. On the morning in memory he had slipped out of the shop to talk to Annie. And though Cecil could not recall any of the pleasantries

they had actually exchanged, he could remember how double-voiced the young man with the frayed white apron and corrugated button-boots had seemed to be—just as if what he was saying had two meanings, one for Annie and one for himself.

And Annie had giggled on, while her cotton-gloved hand stroked gently the iron handle of the perambulator above Cecil's dumpy thumb. He hadn't liked the young man, and had even attempted to lift his young eyes just to give him a stare, to show it. The pain had dreadfully frightened him. And he was glad Annie had afterwards married a strange postman who had come to help in the district during the Valentine season.

This romantic little recollection for some reason made him still more ill at ease, and once again he reassured himself by clutching at the glove in his pocket. He hated the shops in this busier time of the day. He hated all crowds, "gatherings", congregations. He could tell by the legs and feet of the people thronging the street and its shop windows that from their upper parts they were also curiously examining this green-shaded stranger in their midst.

"What the devil!" he would now and then quietly mutter to himself. And then perhaps: "Oh, mind your eye!" These hardly refined exclamations, picked up he knew not whence, were part of the life Grummumma knew nothing about. And still he held on, with that gentle antenna-like movement of his ivory-headed cane, and with rapid searching glances from under his shade at every human extremity that came into view.

This was his sixth similar excursion, and to-day he pushed on still further—three more shops: an ironmonger's, with lawn mowers, syringes, pruning-knives and slug traps in the low window, all well within view; a tobacconist's—but Cecil had not been taught to smoke—and a tailor's and outfitter's.

Here for a moment he came to a pause. For a moment even his mission edged a little out of his mind. He adored clothes. Apart from his little collection of unframed prints and engravings and postage stamps, and apart, of course, from the plate on Sundays, they were all but his only means of being extravagant. In blind furious moments he had, it is true, more than once given every penny he had in his pocket to some dog-guarded "blind man", or paralytic,

or forlorn-looking shrew selling matches in the street. This was not exactly charity, even though his heart seemed to gulp in his body at sight of them. It was a hostage to fortune, a clumsy attempt to call quits, perhaps.

For, in general, like Grumumma, Cecil detested beggars, and edged away from anything that could be described as ghastly, horrible, or even unpleasant. He detested rags, dirt and neglect; even the brazen spectacle of "potatoes" in stockings or of leaking welts failed to amuse him. His shoes, his suits, his own gloves and hats and other adornments were made to measure. He enjoyed considering himself a fop; his little, innocent airs and graces were a sort of hobby. The "man" would call at the house, and Mrs. le Mercier, anxious to indulge any little harmless whim, would leave them to themselves. In all that concerns clothes and kindred matters, indeed, Cecil was at least as much of an expert as was Thomas Carlyle; and this morning he edged slowly along the display in the window, digesting for future use the exclusive shapes and tints and fabrics displayed on the other side of its plate glass.

Then suddenly at whisper of a silken frou-frou behind him, a flush of shame mounted into his pale cheeks, and he turned about and retraced his footsteps. And Providence was watching over him. For he had trailed on not more than a dozen paces or so when, having arrived at the two private doors separating tobacconist's from ironmonger's, his anxious glance alighted on the long expected. And every drop of blood in him stood still.

The owner of this particular pair of shoes must herself have reached the tobacconist's while he had been engaged at the outfitter's. And, though the indiscriminate noises of the street had suddenly mounted up into a prolonged roar, and then had ceased, and though every fibre of Cecil's body seemed to be at an affrighting stretch, he knew as well as if an angel had whispered it into his ear, that she—the longed-for stranger—was now actually surveying the peculiar creature he appeared to be.

In a strange, dizzy eternity, every forecast of this meeting, turned over and over in his mind night after night of late before he had fallen asleep, fled on the four shining winds of heaven. It was as if he had come to the very end of a long straight road—and then, nothing.

He had forgotten Grummumma, Canon Bagshot, Miss Bolsover, Mrs. Grundy, all the conventions and his manners; he had forgotten himself, his shade, the glove, the universe. There was nothing anywhere but just this mute unknown figure, of whose slim person in its black-braided blue serge skirt less than one-third was visible to him. How odd that even in a world renowned for its oddities just a scarcely perceptible little flaw in the sewing of a toe-cap would alone have been enough to distinguish those shoes from every other "footwear" in man's five continents!

Perceptible—no, that was not the real mystery. The shoes, the skirt, were all he could see; and yet it seemed the presence of this unknown girl, the very being of her, flooded his senses, his mind, and—one might almost add—his soul. There was not even the perfume of the glove to help him. Possibly that slim malacca cane of his had now become in sober truth one of a pair of human antennæ. What he had meant to say, what he had heard himself saying again and again—not a single syllable of it recurred to his mind. His chin had lifted itself by a fraction of an inch. He could scarcely breathe, and his heart, as though it were a hare on a dewy hillside when distant hounds are hallooing, seemed to be sitting perfectly still in its ribbed cage.

"Forgive me," he heard a voice utterly unfamiliar and yet his own, pleading, "please forgive me. I have been looking for you for days and days and days. This is your glove." He was holding it out, as if, poor young man, it was the very secret of his life.

At this the feet beneath his gaze seemed to have planted themselves a little more firmly in their shoes. There was an enormous pause, while instinctively the young woman hesitated to thrust out her gloved right hand or her bare left, till this moment concealed in her skirt. As a matter of fact, it was the bare left hand that came into Cecil's view. And at first glimpse of it—though Cecil was unconscious of the cause for at least half an hour afterwards—a frigid and nauseating misgiving and disappointment had swept over him.

"And here," said the voice, "here's the very hand it belongs to. Thank you *ever* so much."

Perhaps because their fellow servants, his eyes, were unable to be of as much service as they might have been,

Cecil's ears were acuter than most. Before that voice's sound had come to an end, he had half-consciously examined and dissected its every minutest cadence and nuance, just as a connoisseur may sit down to the critical enjoyment, say, of a fugue by Bach, or a melody of Handel's. It rang within him—it very quietly rang within him—and he never doubted in the least that he could read not only as much of its owner, but even of its owner's past in its inflexions. How strange for never in the world was there such a benighted ignoramus, such a poor, abandoned creature on a remote atoll, as he.

"Yes," said the voice, "that's *it* right enough. I should know it, if by nothing else, by the hole in the first finger. I hate mending, and I haven't much time. But how you came to know it was mine, and why you should have taken so much trouble about it simply beats me. It simply beats me, I confess."

Every vestige of self-confidence had by this time evaporated in Cecil's mind. Yet—and how he managed it he could not conceive—the next remark he heard himself making appalled him by its boldness: "I want, if you don't mind," he said, "to keep it. Or will you please let me give it you another time?"

He could not see the longish nose and the dark eyes beneath the delicate, curved dark eyebrows of the face now confronting him beneath its cheap straw hat. Its whole attention was steadily, the least bit suspiciously, and yet with immeasurable candour fixed on his mouth. "It isn't of much *value*," said the voice, but without the faintest trace of mockery in it.

"No, but you see," blurted Cecil anxiously, "I have kept it so many days now, and should miss it. . . . I haven't very much to do, you see. And, of course, not many friends."

This was well on the right side of exaggeration, since in sober fact and in any real meaning of the word, he hadn't any friends at all. For though his rather remote cousin Eirene seemed to be almost more often in the house than not, and was occasionally accompanied by familiars of her own of both sexes, Cecil could never be perfectly at his ease with her, let alone with them. Nor could he ever be quite sure why she was so persistently sympathetic. He hated that even more than he deplored her silly French shoes and the colours



and patterns she chose for her clothes. As for her friends, they never took any notice of him, no more at least than if he were a rather unusual chair, a dumb animal, or a pet canary that spent its existence pecking at a blunt-headed yellow spray of groundsel and enjoying an unlimited supply of lump sugar.

"Well," responded the clear, crisp voice, "even if you haven't, you don't seem to mind very much."

"I mind *enormously*," cried the young man, so loudly that he positively alarmed a little old gentleman with a purplish face and pale blue eyes who happened to be passing at the moment, and who whipped round on him like a startled bird.

"Then why don't you make some?" inquired the voice.

"I meant not friends---the glove," blurted Cecil desperately. "I mean, I want to *keep* it. May I give it you next time? To-morrow?"

"I am not so sure as I can get out," replied the stranger.

"Well if you please could and *would*," he said, "I shall be waiting here at this time. I shall be waiting here until---"

"Until?" echoed the other.

"Why, until," he trailed on, "there is no hope at all of your ever coming again."

Once more there came a pause. The eyes regarding him had fallen, and were now overwhelmed, though evidently not for the first time, by a cloud of doubt and perplexity.

"Well, I really don't know that I ought to be seeing you again, I really don't---" the stranger's voice was repeating, as if she were speaking to herself. "We don't know one another, and it isn't as if *you*. . . . Not that I should---necessarily---mind that."

For the breath of an instant Cecil's hand had fluttered towards his pocket as if to produce a card. It dropped again. "My name is only Jennings," he said. "And I have a perfectly silly Christian name though it exactly describes me, I suppose---what I look like, I mean. So perhaps you wouldn't mind about that. And though, if you don't mind, I won't ask you yours now---not here and now, I mean; surely we do know one another now---a little? And will you *come*?"

He awaited her answer, lips ajar, shoulders stooping, as if in expectation of manna from heaven.

"And meanwhile, I suppose, I am to keep *this* hand

somehow covered up!" There may have been the faintest ring of defiance in her tone and yet, it seemed, not defiance of *him*. "Very well, then. I'll come. And then you promise to give me my glove? Not because it's of much value—even to me; but because I was already thinking of buying another pair of gloves and—and losing *them* and so—well, that's settled, then."

At this poor Cecil was more confused and dismayed than he could have imagined possible. He had suddenly become aware of but one small fraction of himself, the dove-grey, suède-clad hand that held his cane. "I don't see how you can *ever* forgive me," he blurted with crimson cheeks beneath the green. "I had no idea——"

"Why, how should you? And there's nothing to forgive as I know of. And now I *must* be off."

She was gone. Cecil was alone again. As much alone as if he stood high up on a desert island, safe after shipwreck. But gradually the bustle and babel, the sights and sounds and smells of the street returned to his perception. He came to himself, and suddenly realizing the enormity of these proceedings, was utterly at a loss how to look, to move, to free himself, to find his bearings. But the hateful shops at last were left behind him; and, gently forging his course along familiar pavements and yet all but into a world that until that moment he had never dreamed to exist, he was soon safely home.

Until that now remote day when Cecil had picked up the stranger's glove, his secrets had been chiefly of an inward kind. His outer life, his funny little groping ways and traits and fads and interests and everything he possessed, including his tailor's and hatter's bills—all these Grummumma had shared to the full. Not that she ever openly intruded. Not that she exacted confidence. There are other methods of opening a lock than by forcing it. But apart from that, it is difficult to associate ladies of unusually ample proportions with the activities of the spy. Cecil knew perfectly well, and had been again and again assured that anything Grummumma might do would always be kindly meant. She invariably had his happiness at heart and watched over it, too. It was her mature, not only in regard to Cecil, but to the world at large. Indeed, those fine black eyes of hers appeared to have

so extensive a range that any attempt at concealment or subterfuge would be a mere waste of ingenuity.

What passed within was another matter. By steadily following the path of least resistance, though he was candour and openness itself by impulse, Cecil had tended as he grew up to become more and more secretive concerning anything that happened in his mind. That mind had thus become the queerest of little refuges all his own. To watch him *there* was almost like watching the innocent inmate of a 'private lunatic asylum or a novice in a nunnery. None the less this "closeness" was due, not to the inability to say anything, but to the want of anybody to say all that he wanted *to*. The garden itself was choked to overflowing; at times he felt he *must* jump over its wall and bolt.

So it must have been merely because Grummumma was not interested in his mental states that she now failed to notice anything unusual. She remarked, it is true, at luncheon that morning, glancing at him over a forkful of green peas, that he seemed a little out of sorts.

"If I may venture, Cecil, upon a piece of advice," she said when the peas had been safely steered to their destination, "and it is none the worse because, as you know, I have long acted upon it myself, I should eat a little less *meat*."

He made no reply; and it was perhaps unfortunate that, as usual, she was unable to see his eyes—eyes now bent on the tiny slice of lamb on his plate and with an expression so innocent of any particular interest in it that she might for once in her life have been tempted to speculate on what he was thinking about. As a matter of fact, Cecil's whole being was tossing at this moment on a positive sea of the unusual. He *was* incredibly, immeasurably "out of sorts." A complete convoy of ideas, fancies, interests, circumstances that had hitherto accompanied him on his voyage from one eternity into another, had simultaneously foundered before his very eyes. Had foundered in an ocean immense, unimaginable, its crested billows of a dazzling whiteness, its arching skies of an unplumbable blue.

It was odd, indeed, though he hadn't realized the oddity, that in his *imagination* no effort had been needed to survey whatever dizzy heights and depths might there suddenly reveal themselves. "Meat!" he had never felt less hungry in his life. How rare an experience to be welcoming Grum-

mumma's advice! He pushed aside untasted his remnant of lamb, and even the three new, innocent, little potatoes that accompanied it on his plate. He regaled himself with the green peas; and it seemed as though every single hour of his life—or at least of all its solitude—had been merely waiting for this morning.

Grummumma—crooking that charming little finger of hers on her plump white hand—having tossed off the last drops of her customary glass of sherry; the crumbs of her Bath Oliver having been already neatly brushed up into a heap on the damask table-cloth—rose at last to her feet.

"This afternoon," she explained, with a last hasty brush of her table napkin over her lips, "I have to see Colonel Sprigge with reference to the Home." Her Home, that was, for Girls; not the one whose roof so capaciously sheltered herself and the young man still seated at the table. "And what are *you* proposing to do?" She archly wagged her head at him.

"I thought, you know," he said, "of looking over my arrow-heads. Or I might, perhaps, take another little stroll."

Cecil's head with its peaked shade, as it slowly veered round in her direction, had a peculiar resemblance to a searchlight, though a searchlight has no cowl.

"Well, my dear boy, no matter," returned Grummumma in that ample fashion which somehow always seemed to suggest a tinge of magnanimous impatience, "do exactly as you please. But don't for mercy's sake fatigue your eyes with those dreadfully uninteresting, and I am sure, perfectly murderous, scraps of flint. We can imagine to what dreadful bloodthirsty uses *they* must once have been put. And if you *do* take a walk, keep out of the sun. Tea, then, in your own room, at half-past four. If my talk with Colonel Sprigge permits it, I shall be home about six."

She was gone, silks, voice, presence, and all. And Cecil was left alone with his raspberry tart and cream, and his thoughts. He sat on until he heard the large varnished door emphatically shut. For a few minutes even after that he remained absolutely still in his chair. And then the skirts of the parlour-maid sounded at the door. He rose and, seizing his grey felt hat and his malacca cane, followed Mrs. le Mercier out into the afternoon sunshine.

He had armed himself with the key to the gate of the

neighbouring "Gardens," the freedom of which Grummumma shared with her discreet neighbours. Following a winding, bush-screened, gravel path, he came to a seat beside a patch of ornamental water; and there he sat down.

An immense dejection, hardly due to any heedlessness of diet, had taken possession of him. All that he had intended to say to his stranger—all, rather, that deep down in his mind, even though unexpressed in words, he had hoped to make clear to her—welled up into remembrance. All that he had actually said and done, those clumsy, stuttered speeches, the absurd, motionless way in which he had stood, that conceit about his own silly name, the hideous discourtesy of refusing to share hers after practically asking her to tell him it, all that miserable meaninglessness—the whole scene came flooding back to remembrance.

He did not mind the young woman's thinking him anything she pleased except only the feeble nincompoop he had shown himself to be. The clear, cool voice re-echoed in his mind—her openness, the frank, matter-of-fact tone in which she had claimed the missing glove. He knew exactly how she had stood there, poised and still, searching him with her eyes. Why, he hadn't even offered her his hand when they had said good-bye. Had he even raised his hat? His thoughts whirled impotently in a vortex. He longed to go fumbling off once more into the High Street with the faintest shadow of hope that she might by a miracle be there. And to think that, when she had appeared, he had been gloating into a hatter's! And now a whole day to go; and that voice echoing on—unnaturally quiet, surely, for her age! Supposing she fell ill, or—why, anything might happen to prevent their meeting again. And he hadn't even the smallest notion where she lived!

Perhaps she was just being kind to him. He was used to that. Why should she really have had the faintest intention of meeting him again, of being made horribly conspicuous by standing there in that vile crowd of sightseers talking into a kind of green silk funnel. Perhaps she had just wanted to get rid of him.

No, no. Nothing mattered. He must just wait. Just wait for the chance to put everything right; to *tell* her that nothing mattered, except only that she must not let him be

any kind of a trouble or burden ; that he would never bother her again. And might he perhaps . . . ?

The strained eyes remained tightly shut for a few moments. When they opened again, a solitary swan that had somehow contrived to keep its pride and beauty even in the muddy shallows of this "ornamental water," had floated in close under the bank, as if in need of company, or possibly of crumbs. Cecil stared at the creature from under his shade. Its virgin snow burned in the sunshine at least as purely as those on the far mountain-tops he would never see. The arched plumes of its wings were softly mantled. Its round eye glittered. Its dark-webbed feet were softly paddling beneath the greenish, oil-like water.

It was an awful thing to sit there looking at it, and be so unhappy. Cecil was torn to pieces with longing. He didn't want to live any more. If the first real miracle that had happened in his life could leave him as miserable and dejected as this, what of the rest, of the years that remained ? If only he had had a little worldly wisdom, he might at least have known what *not* to say. He could at least have shown the rudiments of courtesy. Why, she must have scarcely any money at all, not enough even to buy a new pair of gloves with, and he had forced the confession of it out of her like the most unutterable of cads !

But there comes an end at last even to self-abasement. A wan and rather sickly smile had spread over Cecil's face as he continued to watch this sequestered bird on the water. He took the scapegoat glove out of his pocket and examined the little, round, worn hole in the first finger of it. A sigh that was uncommonly like a sob shook him. "May God bless you for ever and ever !" he muttered in an anguish of sentiment, and pushed it back into his pocket again. And as if the swan had been positively tarrying in the narrow creek beneath him for this precise benediction, it now unruffled its rose-flushed wings and, steering into the blaze of the sun, oared itself out of sight.

Cecil turned home. There was one thing to be thankful for. He had been given a latch-key—to save the servants. He turned that key very quietly in the lock. It was twenty minutes to five, though how his charming watch had managed to deceive itself into making hours of what had seemed a few minutes completely baffled him.

His tea was awaiting him in the large white sitting-room that adjoined his bedroom. He poured it out—tepid, rich, red-brown, and there under the cover of the dish was the particular kind of scone with a trace of butter on it that he had detested the taste of ever since he could remember. And there, too, was yesterday's slice of plum cake. And out *there* the chirruping of sparrows. Everything was exactly the same as it had always been; and he himself—gross, clumsy, dull-witted—was merely somebody in a dream that had already come to an end. It was monstrous, this "life"!

He put down his cup, rose to his feet, tiptoed out of the room, and having reached his dressing-table, took up the brushes he found there. But this was pretence of course; he had not come to brush his hair. He had come to see as much as possible of the self that she had seen from top to toe. For a minute or two he stood listening, then raised his face by a painful inch or so to peer in at what was confronting him in the wide, mahogany looking-glass. And almost before the slightest sensation of the agony that would ensue, if he persisted, had made itself felt, almost before he had time to realize the fatuity of the attempt, he had turned abruptly away and was presently nibbling his buttered scone, and, despite Grummumma's warnings of the perils of indigestion, had poured himself out an even richer and redder cup of tea.

The sparrows continued to chirp, the western sunlight to pour into the room. But the waft of steam with its gentle gyrations on the surface had thinned away and the contents of the handsome Dresden cup were stone cold before Cecil came out of his reverie; for one tiny memory that had been steadily skulking at the back of his mind had at last gnawed its way out. And the process had left him with a deadly hollow ache beneath his heart. Grummumma might be a jealous goddess, but until this instant Cecil had never been conscious of such pangs. Yet, as he gazed on in memory at the shoes, the skirt, the sleeve, and the bare hand that had for an instant touched his own, he was conscious of but one corroding doubt—that ring!—a ring of discoloured turquoises which he had seen encircling the third finger of that left hand!

Yet when he raised his head at last, something very

like serenity had come back into his mind. He would explain everything to-morrow. He would be perfectly calm and collected. He would give back the glove and prove at any rate that he was "gentleman" enough, however queer a specimen, to withdraw out of this stranger's life with a little more courtesy and less confusion than had accompanied his intrusion into it.

To judge from Grummumma's *sotto voce* remarks to the parlour-maid during their solitary dinner that evening, the consultation with Colonel Sprigge on the affairs of the Home had tried her patience. Apart from this, the courses followed one another in silence. And the occasional diamond-like effects of Grummumma's eyes in her rather wax-like face, owing to this preoccupation, were otherwise engaged than in scrutinizing the young man who sat opposite her.

When, next morning, Cecil glided rapidly past under Mr. Flaxman Smith's drawing-room window, the pretty parlour-maid, glancing down at him, discovered two things, and both of them to her consternation, for to-day was her afternoon out: first, that it looked as if a storm was coming on, and next, that her kitchen clock had once more and quite unaccountably lost at least half an hour.

But it was Cecil who paid for them by finding himself at his trysting place exactly that much before his time. He hated being a spectacle, yet this morning it didn't seem in the least to matter. Waiting gave him the opportunity, too, to get cool again and to recover externally, at any rate, his usual fastidious serenity and aloofness. If only his thoughts would follow suit! If only he could breathe more easily! If only he could for an instant suppose that she would come!

So helpless and motionless the figure of the young man showed at last, standing there like a sentry close up against the private doors of the tobacconist's and the ironmonger's shops, that a tender-hearted young woman, taking him for an unfortunate aristocrat who had come down in the world, actually pressed a threepenny-piece into the loose, dangling hand, and then sped rapidly on. Little actions may have large effects. Cecil's icy-hot chagrin had instantly given way to an almost childish amusement. Threepenny-bits are for luck. And Cecil actually lifted the coin to his lips and deliberately spat on it before pushing it into his waistcoat pocket



It was money gotten under false pretences. He might at any moment be run in. A shudder of sheer dare-devilry coursed down his spine. Let come what would—if only it were she ! This peculiar smile was still hovering over the lower part of his face when, indeed, the young woman, as punctual as May Day, and as unexpected as a miracle, was suddenly once more in his company ; and Cecil found himself in gentle motion at her side.

The grotesquely intense face of the day before could not so much as have hinted at the joy that now radiated from it—from his very finger-tips. And but one glance as it affected the mind of this young stranger supposed she had “made up.” None the less, “Look here, before I go,” she was saying breathlessly, “I have been thinking over what happened yesterday. And what first I can’t understand is why you shouldn’t have given me my glove then and there.”

Cecil’s fingers holding his cane managed somehow also to clasp tight the threepenny-bit in his waistcoat pocket, while his other hand kept guard on the glove. His good angel was smiling at him from over his narrow shoulder.

“Why, you see,” he said with an instinctive little bow that might have graced a Spanish grandee, “it seemed so horribly public, and I knew you hated being looked at. Besides, you said I might keep it. Of course,” he added as if almost driven into a corner, “I ought to have gone straight off to the Police.”

“The Police, *that* thing ! The things you say ! Still I *do* say you must have picked it up very, very quickly. I came back the next moment to look for it, and there was nothing and nobody there—besides all this, I mean. It seems so very odd to me you didn’t *notice* who had been so stupid. I am always losing things ; though I really don’t see why I should be reminded of it by—by strangers.” There was a pause, and then in a flash, and sharp as a dart, came the question : “Had you ever seen me before ?”

Cecil faltered. “If you are going to be angry,” he said, “I don’t think I shall be able to do or say anything at all. All I want is just to try and explain myself and to give you the glove back. At least I don’t, I mean, *want* to do that, but must. It was hateful of me to keep it. You see, I hardly know anybody, though that is not why—I wanted to know *you*. I had never, never seen you before, on my oath—and now

. . . I suppose you'd hardly believe it possible but—since then, I have thought of *nobody*, of *nothing* else."

The dark, attentive eyes had slipped over his delightfully tasteful apparel, head to heel. How little it told her. And yet that "I don't know why," and the quiet, restful sigh that had followed his last words had suddenly stilled the cautious, suspicious mind within.

"You don't know anybody! Then in that case how can you possibly *want* to know anybody you know absolutely nothing about? Why it's broad—" and again she could have bitten her tongue off at such clumsiness—"you haven't even," she rapidly corrected herself, "asked me who I am. Quite the contrary. What is more, I can't stop talking to you in this hateful mob of people. Probably you don't know how they stare—and don't care. But I *have* got appearances to keep up."

"That's just it, that's just it," cried the young man as if in the depths of despair. "I care enormously. I loathe them. Isn't there *anywhere* we could go to be quiet for a moment? I only want just to say, however absurd it may sound, that I *do* know you—I didn't know I could ever know anybody so well, and that it was utterly mean of me not to give you back your glove at once. And to keep you like this being stared at! Oh, if you only knew how I detest these horrible legs scissoring around us, you would at least realize I didn't mean to do *that*."

A curious, crooked expression—expectation, incredulity, longing, dismay—hung over the face he couldn't see.

"Look here," she said, "I didn't mean to be a pig about it. I don't suppose—" she flung back her head a little, "I don't suppose you have ever so much as guessed that you are not the only young fellow loafing about on the 'Parade.' It is hateful to talk here, and I'd like to explain a little, too. What's more, by God's help, it happens to be early-closing day. I'm in a linen-draper's shop, you know—serve out the gloves I can't afford to buy. There is the river. Shall we go there? But I mustn't be very long."

At least a dozen considerations came clattering into Cecil's mind. To become the busiest of conspirators needs very little practice in conspiring. There was Grummumma, there was luncheon. There were the private gardens. There were the grounds of the Rectory at the corner where you turn

in by the bridge to the towpath. To put anything off might be absolute disaster. Above everything in this world he wanted not to be remembered as one of the young fellows on the Parade. That vista appalled him—though he hardly knew why. Skunks, musk-rats, and boa-constrictors couldn't have a nastier flavour. Could he possibly get to the river without being seen? Could he possibly take *anything* of a look round? And supposing. . . . And then, in an instant, nothing seemed to matter. He was at peace and at ease.

"I can walk quite fairly fast," he replied cheerfully, "if you would just let me keep what I can see of you in the corner of my eye while we are crossing the road. May it be the river?"

It must be confessed there was no extravagant oddity in the outward appearance of the two of them, as, busily talking, they steered their way across from Messrs. Ewart & Sons, the ironmongers, to the corner a little beyond the Post Office, and then on down Unicorn Street round by the sawmills. Furtively skirting the Bagshot orchard, they presently found themselves breathing the cool but stagnant sweetness of the air by the river. Its meadows on the farther side were fringed with drifts of fool's parsley; and on this side were tented with round leafy verdant lime trees; while nearer the water, glassing themselves in its flowing dark, hung the whispering green-grey of pollard willows.

Why this young stranger hurried quickly past a seat with a sloping back to it no more than a pace or two from the water and under an Eden-like bower which the authorities had somehow refrained from polling, and why she chose instead a low, hard one of oak full in the thinning glare of the sun, Cecil did not even attempt to guess. His only hope was to postpone for an hour or so the thunderstorm which was obviously completing its preparations; to say all that he wanted to say; and to hear as much as possible of what he longed to hear before it was too desperately near the stroke of one.

Here, then, these two seated themselves. And she herself, her bare hands, on either side of her, clasped on the edge of the hot wood, her narrow face now averted, now swiftly glancing at him, at once began talking so fast that he could scarcely find breath enough to follow her up.

"I don't really want to know who you are," she said

once more. "I don't see that it matters, at least not to me. Not a bit. I *believe* you about the glove. I don't believe you have told me anything that is not the truth. So if you *do* make anything up—just taradiddles, you know—you may as well realize that I shall probably believe you. Then it will be *my* responsibility. And yet—well, I don't think somehow you will do that, either; though I shouldn't blame you if you did. I never knew any man that didn't, anyhow. If you'd like to keep the glove, why keep it. There's not very much in this world that seems to *me* much worth troubling about. They don't even *want* to mean what they say. But if anyone had told me two or three days ago that I should be sitting here with you this morning, when I had promised to—to go out with a cousin of mine, well—" the dark eyes continued to brood over the now strangely shadowed meadows on the farther bank of the river, "well, what I say is, that's *my* business. I'm free to do what I like, I suppose, whatever they may say. Still, you *are* rather—rather out of the usual, you know."

And yet, though she had all but implored Cecil not to tell her who he was, "or anything like that," he was presently pouring out very little else. As usual, his mind began to hunt about in what she had been saying like a terrier suddenly let loose in a rabbit warren. Where next, and where next? Perhaps it was the echo in his mind of the word "cousin" that at last made an end to these confessions. His lips closed a little tighter.

"This is a horribly personal question," he faltered, "and you need not answer it of course if you feel you don't want to; but would you perhaps mind telling me—" he pointed a forefinger to within an inch of the turquoises that showed bluer, it seemed, because of the bleached grey of the wood that surrounded the finger which they encircled, "would you mind telling me if you are engaged to be married?"

His companion positively gasped. A crimson flush mounted up into her cheeks. She buried her hands in her lap. "And so you *think*," she cried, stooping forward over them, her head twisted awry almost under the very rim of his unsightly eye-shade, "you *think* I should be sitting here with you if the man I was engaged to was waiting to—to go out with me? My God! It just shows what horrible mistakes one can make. I don't say a girl shouldn't do as

she pleases," she went on even more rapidly, and stooping closer over her lap, her eyes fixed straight in front of her on the worn green grass at their feet. I *am* free to do just what I like. But if you think—after what you have said—that I would do a thing like that—when I positively kept my promise to the very minute to be fool enough, after all I've gone through, to come and wait *there* for you in the street—well, all I can say is, I understand exactly the *kind* of old lady the one you say you live with *is*."

Apart from anything else this impassioned speech might imply, it shot a bleaker shaft of light on Grummumma than Cecil even in his most discontented moments had so much as conceived possible. Grummumma!—somehow to get rid of her, to put her exactly in her right place seemed to be his only way of escape, or at any rate the only possible way of keeping this explosive, enigmatic stranger sitting here beside him in this paradise amid the encircling gloom for just a few minutes longer.

"I assure you, I swear to you," he said, "that she is not so bad as that. She has been immensely kind to me. How would *you* like to take charge, or whatever you like to call it, of a person who, who—well, like *me*! I realize of course you must hate the thought of being *seen* with me. You needn't suppose I don't know what they have done for me in making me like this. But I swear, I *swear* I always thought a ring on the third finger of anybody's left hand *meant* an engagement." He groped around as if his mind were absorbed in an inextricable mathematical problem. "And after all it *is* on your left hand!"

A dead silence fell between them. The hands in the worn blue serge lap tightly clasped themselves together; that was all. The young woman never stirred.

"Wasn't that funny of me?" an almost unrecognizable voice a minute or so afterwards questioned him. "Goodness! if I *was* engaged to my cousin—though this particular he happens to be a she—why, pray *shouldn't* I be sitting here putting things right with you and keep him waiting a bit? I have precious little time to myself. I've had my fill of what they really want. And he wouldn't keep me long engaged if he made a fuss about that, I can tell you. I just—if you must know the truth—I wear this ring *now* because I prefer to be alone. I'm sick of the way they—well, *that's* why. And now,

please don't think I am asking this for any—for any horrible motives ; but if you *did* see this thing on my finger yesterday, why didn't you give me back my glove ?”

In the comparatively few years of his secluded existence, Cecil had become thoroughly accustomed to being catechized. But not exactly like this. And now, unlike most such little experiences in the past, his one aim and desire at this moment was to share with his inquisitor every single little bit of the truth that was in him. He succeeded in this so admirably at length that the two of them had soon abandoned all misgivings and reserve and were chasing together every least little thought and experience that happened to poke up its happy head into the wilderness of their minds.

It was a wilderness that had begun to blossom like the rose. They had discovered the solitude only two can share. By now, indeed, not a single human soul was to be seen near at hand. And for obvious reasons

But though Cecil was capable of leaping blindly to conclusions on what for most people would be the most inadequate grounds, though but one glance at the sullen surface of the water, one moment's attention to the torpid hush that was now hanging its ever-thickening veils around them, would instantly have warned him of what was coming, he was far too intent on other things to heed. And his companion didn't care. Never, never could either of them have guessed what an immense reservoir of living water had lain treasured up and concealed in memory. One twist of the fingers that now lay unfolded in the stranger's lap beneath his very eyes—why, even that empty glove—had suddenly turned on the tap. It seemed the flood would never cease.

As for herself, a courageous, if not dare-devil heedlessness of the future was her unrealized philosophy. She knew well enough what they were in for. It was there before her eyes, in her blood, in her brain, in every nerve. She was its centre, its very eye. And the sudden dartings of her dark glances to and fro drank in the complete menace of the scene with avidity.

As she herself had repeatedly hinted, “young fellows” of the utmost assurance and aplomb were to be found in full display morning and night, parading the pavements of the High Street. And yet this young man who now shared the

river seat with her, with whom she was actually talking indeed as if they had shared the same nursery, had somehow managed to stay clean outside that dashing category. He was as different in appearance, in talk, in manners, in the complete, odd effect he had on her mind, as a coral island is from darkest Africa.

She knew "a thing or two" as well as any thing or two *can* be known. And the knowledge had sufficed for most little crises in what had been a fairly lively but what could hardly have been described as a lavish existence. She had even confessed to Cecil only a moment or so ago that though the cousin already mentioned had had nothing to do with it, except as a confidante, she had herself already been, as she supposed, more than once in love. Just to say it all quite easily like that seemed somehow to prove how irremediably *out* of love she was now. The confession seemed to be its own absolution. And yet, with another sudden flaming of colour in her cheek, she had easily managed to refrain from expressing her sentiments concerning the young man who had been responsible for the last experiment.

She could at least play fair even on behalf of a creature who hadn't the least notion of what the phrase meant. And she had twisted what had first sprung to her lips into: "I didn't see as how I *could* go on caring for him. There isn't much in me, but I do believe in trying to be—if you understand what I mean—all of oneself there is. It was no fault of his, not at least that he'd know of, but—" once more the deep, dark, and tragic eyes stole over the louring meadows that lay beyond the water, "well, there, you may think me a beast, if you like, but I came at last to hate him. Oh, how I hated him! It's gone now; it's over; and yet it has dyed me through and through. At least so I thought until—I didn't see *what* could come of it, I mean, but just a sort of suffocation if . . ."

Cecil had waited patiently for the end of the sentence.

"Well, if we had got married," she added, as if the word meant hanged-drawn-and-quartered. "Not that I suppose we ever should have been. It sounds awful, I know, as any friend said at the time; but I don't care even if it does. I am *glad* it" . . . Again she broke off, as if in sudden dread of her own impetuosity. "There! that's all, that's all! I can't go back. No one could ask me to." And the fixed

wide eyes which the rejected young man had never really seen, and Cecil couldn't, were the very straightest of witnesses to the honesty of her tongue.

When at least half a dozen thoughts are entangled together in one's mind, it is difficult to express any. And Cecil had been utterly unable to make any comment on this statement before the young woman had swiftly dropped the clue. She could not imagine why her cheeks hadn't the sense to keep their natural pallor this morning; it wasn't a habit of theirs to go on in this silly fashion. Yet why on earth should it matter *what* they did, when that funny green shade prevented anybody worth looking at them from seeing them.

"Here I am," her voice ran on breathlessly, in broken cadences up and down its scale—a clear challenging voice; "here I am, talking and talking, yet you are telling me nothing at all about yourself. And soon there won't be another chance."

"Another chance!" cried Cecil in guttural tones. "You mean you won't see me again? You can't mean that! Why, here I am, seeing you now—if," he added dismally, "if seeing is the right word to use. And yet I still keep on saying to myself, 'It's not the ten-thousandth part.' Please do try and understand: I want to see *you—you*. Oh, your very self. You couldn't have meant that."

"*Me?*" returned a faint and rather shaken voice. "*Me!* there's nothing in *me*. Besides," and the tones flattened a little in spite of the fact that a faint smile had crept into her eyes, "that would be seeing me double."

"I said it. I mean it," said Cecil stubbornly. "I don't believe it would be possible for me ever to know you enough. Everything you say leads me on as if, oh, into another world, and even this one—I can't explain. I never knew there was such a place to be in as where we are now and yet," it was as if a sudden light had flooded his mind, "what you have said as yet has been nothing but—sign-posts."

The dark eyes pondered. "I think," she said, "if I thought you were not meaning every syllable you say I should never hold up my head again."

The thin, delicate face was now averted; the narrow left hand, as if purely of its own volition, had turned itself palm upward on her knee. Even a young man twenty times less accustomed to looking down than Cecil might have noticed



it. But if he did, he made no movement. He merely sat a little stiller.

"Mean? You!" he said, as if in utter perplexity. "Why, even to be seen with a creature like me must be a—an imposition." His head stared round on its shoulders. "I assure you," he said with a sudden gleam of humour, "it's an imposition even to me."

Hardly had the little rill of answering laughter sounded out in the sullen air when a headlong rush of wind swept over the motionless meadows that lay opposite to them, turning their rich seeding brown to a livid green, and sweeping the waters of the river into a rippled shield of beaten metal. Dry leaves were flying in it. The tree above them was swept as if by one vast, multitudinous sigh. There came a pause; and then out of the blue-black, cloud-vaulted heavens above their heads, a thin river of light suddenly flickered, like the fangs of a serpent. And as if at a signal, the solid globe beneath this day-benighted couple shook beneath a rattling crash of thunder.

Of the two, the young man must have been the least prepared for this assault. He showed not the faintest trace of being startled, however. He just quietly laid his hand on the upturned palm and in his haste almost whispered, "Quick, how high is the tree above us? I don't know this place. You are frightened. Where shall I take you? Quick!"

The fingers beneath his remained perfectly passive. The laughter that came in reply seemed almost as meaningless as a child's, and as full of gaiety.

"It's the littlest tree I've ever seen," she answered, "and the loveliest. Green and round and bushy, like a toy tree. And they go on like a row of umbrellas right along the bank. So unless they are really aiming at us up there, nothing will matter. Frightened! Please, please understand, I love it all. It's only the rain I am thinking of. What happens to me never, never matters. But what will your—what will the lady you spoke to me about think if you get back wet through?"

"Will you *please* not talk like that. Please not to. It's you I am thinking of, and——"

"And here it comes," cried the young woman triumphantly. Her "it" was neither lightning nor thunder, but a dense league-long veil, part hail, part rain, that had now

come sweeping over the all but blotted-out expanse of country before her eyes. Its *avant-couriers* smote ferociously and with a sharp *tap, tap, tap* on Cecil's silk shade. The wind swept over them as if it were perceptibly condensed against their bodies. An enormous confusion filled the air.

And then, well, indeed you never knew what this odd young man would be doing next. At this moment he was unbuttoning his coat. "You must take this," he was saying; "you have got only the flimsiest things on. Why I can see your arm through the silk."

"Please, please," she cried, catching both his wrists in her entreaty, "don't do anything so utterly stupid. Oh, please—just think! Whatever would they say! And you'll get your death of cold. Look now, see, we'll get round to the other side. There. Do you realize it's a lime tree over us; and it's coming into flower. There's nothing to do—nothing, I *swear*—but just to stay here quietly underneath it until the rain's over."

Quite apart from the haste with which she had panted these sentences, the clamour of the storm now almost drowned her voice. But actions speak louder than words. Cecil struggled no more. And the two of them cowered as close as they could against the dark smooth bole of the young linden tree now tenting her bright green branches over their heads.

When Nature is in one of her passing fits of hysteria, poor little humans must just sit still and smile. Nevertheless, any chance observer of one of these young faces, and of all that was visible of the other, would hardly have described them as smiling. There is a happiness of the spirit that seems to draw an almost grotesque mask over human features, that distorts and makes strange and absurd and yet seems to irradiate them, as if they were merely of glass made for a light to show through.

The next few days of Cecil's life were spent in bed and were at the same time (so far as his mind was concerned), the most active, the most wretched yet rapturous, and the longest he had ever known. The lime tree had proved to be an imperfect umbrella. Cecil had hastened home at last through the rain-washed streets—blindingly silver-bright in the sunshine—in an amazed happiness, on tenterhooks of anxiety, and soaked to the skin.

Grummumma had listened steadily on to his rambling explanations, at the same time rapidly comparing his attempts at chronology with the dining-room clock. Though he had an advantage denied to most men, in that his tell-tale eyes were concealed, Cecil hadn't the making of a skilful prevaricator. This unusual eloquence in so reticent a young man was suspicious. Grummumma, like an immense well-fed cat at a mouse's hole, watched his lips and his hands as he sat there, attempting to swallow his belated luncheon without exhibiting too obvious an effort. But whatever speculations she may have pursued within, remained unexpressed. She was all credulity and indulgence. Even when next morning she stood over him, clinical thermometer between finger and thumb, and announced that his temperature was 101°, she refrained from any "I told you so." After all, the mouse was safely in its hole again, and there would be ample time to find out where it had been straying.

The storm was followed—a rather unusual caprice in an English summer—by a spell of happy, halcyon weather. The patient, however, lying there on his back in his beautiful brass bed, the blinds at the window all but shrouding his room, his shade over his eyes, enjoyed it only at second hand. When Mrs. le Mercier was not either giving him his physic or sitting over him while he consumed milk pudding, his cousin Eirene was. She, however, was the more restless nurse of the two, and again and again would interrupt the *Cranford* she was reading to him in order to mince over to the window and peep out at the day.

"You can't think how lovely it is," she would cry gaily over her shoulder. "It's a *thousand* pities, you poor thing. And I simply can't imagine why you didn't take shelter in a shop. You always go that way, don't you, Cecil?"

And once more Cecil would be compelled to remember the precise terms of the rather fantastic little story he had invented to explain his sousing, a story received by Eirene with a variety of reactions. After what was perhaps the fifth attempt to glean a little further information, she returned to his bedside and, so to speak, took the bull by the horns.

"What Auntie, you know, has perfectly made up her mind about *now* is that you really want somebody to take more care of you. And I am going to be one of the 'some-

bodies.' You are getting mopish, Cecil. You just shut yourself up away from everybody, though you *know* how sympathetic we all can't help being. And what's more, I believe you make things out worse than they are, just to spoil yourself a little. The doctor was saying only the other day that even if it is a little painful, you ought to try ever so little to—you know what I mean—to *make* yourself better."

"My eyes, you mean?" interjected Cecil from his pillow.

"And aren't our eyes," cried Eirene brightly, "almost, as it were, ourselves? Why, *you* see things that I have never even noticed at all. It's quite, quite wonderful. Still, you mustn't mind my speaking out a little, even though you never seem to be really listening to half I say. You couldn't tell me a single word about that last chapter I have been reading, now could you? And I can't bear reading aloud, especially in a room like a vault."

Cecil remained perfectly still in his bed. "You have been kindness itself, Eirene," he replied in a flattish voice; "and it's hateful to keep you here. Do please take a little rest. And—and might I have half an hour's more *Cranford after dinner*?"

"Well, if I must, I must, you naughty boy. But promise me, if I do, that you'll get a little sleep. We all do so much want to help you all we can. It's *so* difficult—just groping in the dark."

There was almost a hint of tears in her voice, and she stooped prettily, though not very far down, as if to blow him a kiss right in underneath the green shade, for as a matter of fact she had always felt a peculiar disinclination to confront those hidden eyes. How was she to tell, then, if her incipient kiss had reached its destination? She eyed the long, green-cowled hummock mistrustfully. "And you've *promised* to turn over a new leaf?" she concluded.

The door gently closed, and the rack on which Cecil lay resumed its more leisurely activities. Of all the rats that were gnawing at his mind, one was never for a moment satisfied—what must his stranger be thinking of him now? With unprecedented presence of mind, his last words had been that he would be found edging along around the shop-end of the Crescent at a quarter-past eleven every morning, *ad infinitum*. Just about then, it appeared, would be her only chance of a few free minutes except in the evenings, and on

Thursdays ; and even they were precarious. Why, Cecil had not attempted to find out.

Sheer instinct had told him that circumstances had never been very kind to her. He realized she must be "poor," and the very sound of the word sent him rushing away from it in his mind as fast as ever he could. From infancy he had been lapped in comparative luxury, and the merest suspicion that beneath Luxury's silken skirts were concealed two bony knees, filled him with incredible dismay. None the less he knew with the immense assurance of mere faith that somehow or other she was not going to be poor for very long ; that he was going to just sweep those circumstances up into a pile and burn them.

There never was a more helpless creature than himself ; he knew that, too. And yet, once or twice in his life he had determined to have his own way, and this was going to be another time. But how see her ? How keep his trust ? How write to her ? How let her have but one word to show that it was only a silly old temperature and a Grummumma and a doctor and a quick-witted nimble-tongued cousin that were for the moment keeping him away ?

He had so many times re-explored in imagination that hour by the river that he now knew every inch of it by heart. And what is more, huddling there beside her under the linden tree, he had actually managed to speak of his infirmity. It was the one thing in the world his tongue hated and detested having anything to do with. Still, it had somehow stumbled out ; and the ordeal had not only proved an immeasurable relief but had also won an immeasurable reward.

"Think worse of you for *that* ! Oh, what an utter meanness you must feel in me ! Why, all along I have almost hoped you were *blind* ; for then, you see, I might have been of help, though I don't quite see how—if ever I mean, we *are* going to meet again. 'Worse,' indeed ! I'd ask the thunder just to swallow me up if I even so much as thought you thought it."

Her face had been turned away from him as she spoke ; and the grass at his feet, studded with small, snow-white daisies and here and there a yellow dandelion, had showed a wild, violent green beneath yet another riot of lightning.

But why did that particular "blind" still make his heart

stand still with delight, while Eirene's nattier little pronunciation of the word just now, rankled in his side like a poisoned arrow? Could anything be odder? And what, indeed, was the matter with Eirene?

Two days ago she was just a first cousin much removed, waiting for him like a lightship, so to speak, irremovably in the offing, both a warning and an eventual refuge against all life's storms. He had always known that if nobody more satisfactory turned up for her Eirene would probably decide to marry him. Grummumma had often spoken about it quite plainly, however playfully; and since Cecil had always hated thinking of the future, he habitually left that future to wait until the present caught up with it.

And now the present had actually done so. And he knew as well as if it had been written down on paper, first that Eirene had suddenly made up her mind—just as if *his* chill had been *her* conflagration, and next, that he had also made up his own. He didn't know exactly how he could manage to persuade his stranger to accept for the time being about two-thirds of his modest income. But it was his, and he was going to do so, and by sheer logic Eirene was therefore *not* going to marry him.

And then, Cecil had suddenly stopped thinking and had actually found himself attempting to put Eirene's advice into practice. Hands clenched, heart pounding, pulses drumming, he was endeavouring, if only by the remotest fraction of an inch, to raise these abject eyes of his in their sockets. A horrible sweat broke out on his forehead. He was shivering from head to foot. He persisted, none the less, until it seemed the very brain beneath his skull was splitting into fragments, and incandescent stars and arrows of light were raining out of the darkness. And then, poor spoiled invalid, he flung himself over on to his pillow, and turning his back upon paradise, wept with rage and chagrin.

When calm returned, there returned with it, hungry as ever, the same old rat. How was he ever to assure the stranger that he was not—well, just another "young fellow"? And once more the words that had haunted him repeated themselves over and over again in his mind: "I came at last to hate him—to hate him." He lay there—stiff and still. Grummumma's step was sounding on the stair; the First Wardress was approaching. Despair swept over him. The

nameless, longed-for one must in sober fact be hating *him* with all her heart and soul this very moment.

But Grummumma (followed by the parlour-maid carrying on a silver salver a dish of sole and a glass of hock), was bringing him, apart from these dainties, news which proved at least that, however extreme that hatred might now be, it was not going to prevent the young people from meeting again. First, she assured him he was much better. That being so she paid very little attention to the grey, damp underpart of the face that lay on the pillow, though even the hair on that pillow was dank with sweat. Being better, he might sit up this afternoon and come down to-morrow. And the afternoon after that he was to receive a visitor. "And I wonder, my dear boy, if you can guess who that will be?"

There had been only the faintest trill on the "that," yet at sound of it his heart stood still. "Is it Canon Bagshot?" he muttered stonily.

"Him, too," breathed Grummumma, "but who else?"

"Eirene's not going away, is she?"

"Not quite yet," smiled Grummumma. "But then, Cecil, she is coming back for good."

"I give it up," said Cecil. "And anyhow I should much prefer to be left alone."

"My dear boy," replied Grummumma, with that hint of unction in her voice she could never keep out of her kindest remarks, "you would always prefer to be left alone. And what do you mean by that, may I ask? Left alone with whom? There are limits surely to one's poor little self. I agree you are tied. But, as Eirene was saying, how long is it since you have made any effort to undo the knot?"

Cecil made no reply.

"You have unnumbered blessings," went on the philanthropist. "Solicitous friends, a little income of your own. And though I agree the handicap has been extreme; yes, Cecil, you even have brains. And people with brains, my dear boy, don't dash their heads against brick walls; don't fly into silly entanglements out of which even the most clear-sighted minds find it difficult to extricate themselves. You *make* little difficulties. And as Dr. Lodge agrees, and indeed as specialist after specialist has assured me, a physical habit is bound to reflect itself in the mind, and also, no doubt,

in the heart. And if in our various spheres of society we have not a certain amount of proper respect for things as they are; if, that is, we don't draw the line somewhere, the consequent difficulties merely end in disaster. And *do*, my dear boy, show *some* little appreciation of that delicious looking sole before it is stone cold on the dish. No; I didn't mean to be led away into a discussion on the physical side"—she flickered in a charmingly helpless fashion her little, fat, ringed hand in the air—"I know nothing of all that. All that I merely wanted to tell you was that I have invited a young lady—a friend of yours—to *tea*."

"A young lady—a friend of *mine*?" Cecil mumbled, as if incredulous of such a marvel.

"Exactly that," cried Grummumma brightly. "She is an assistant in that large new draper's, poor thing; and, considering the practice she has, I must say she writes a charmingly illegible hand."

Cecil plunged clean into the deep end of the bath prepared for him. "I am delighted," he said.

"About the handwriting?" inquired Grummumma.

"That she is coming to tea," said Cecil.

"In my young days, gallantry would have suggested *suggesting* that Miss Simcox should come to tea. Wasn't it in the nature of things that we should wish to know her—after you had met, well, as you did meet. You must have realized long ago that I am never likely to be a stickler for *mere* conventions. Why, then, may I ask, have you been hiding the young lady under your bushel?" The voice was almost prattling in its geniality.

Cecil took a gulp of hock before replying. "Why, Grummumma, since you have asked her to tea, I don't see where the bushel comes in?"

The black handsome eyes had fixed their whole attention on his lips. "But why not at *your* suggestion, Cecil? It was *that* I was asking."

"But surely, Grummumma, one's invitations are pleasanter when they are given on one's own initiative. Yours must be, I am sure." The water was proving more buoyant than he had expected.

"My dear!" she acquiesced. "Then why didn't *you* indulge in one? I find no difficulty in believing that Miss Simcox would have come to tea on Friday with even greater



alacrity and pleasure if my poor little note had been in your handwriting."

"You didn't call on her, then?" mumbled Cecil.

"I proposed to myself the pleasure of her calling on *me*," replied Grummumma. "And to whom, my dear boy, do you owe what I am sure must be this charming acquaintance?"

Cecil never lied. And a kind of nausea at the thought of any further fencing or prevarication suddenly swept over him. If the fat was already in the fire, why shouldn't he set it blazing? He sat up on his bed prim and stiff, his snowy pillows for background; "I *believe*," he stolidly replied, "I just woke up."

"Charming! my dear Cecil, most romantic. But my actual question," Grummumma persisted equably, "was to *whom* do we owe it?"

Cecil jerked up even a little higher and the shade tilted itself almost to the angle of the peak of a guard's signalling lamp. But, if anything, and in spite of it, the light beneath was red rather than green.

"To whom *does* one owe any kind of awakening? Why sometimes, I suppose"—and the voice had fallen flat and cold—"to sheer, downright Providence."

"I must ask Canon Bagshot to give us an address one Sunday on false gods, Cecil. You might learn a little more of the other One—by sheer force of contrast."

There was a pause.

"Will Eirene be here?" Cecil inquired at last, his head now lowered again over his clammy sole.

Mrs. le Mercier's kid-clad right foot was at this moment beating softly on Cecil's deep-piled bedroom carpet. It was her method of purring. She was looking at the china on the luncheon tray and smiling gently, as if consciousness were just over the border of a charming reverie. Then she laid her other little card on the table, patly and finally, since sooner or later it would almost certainly have to be disclosed. "Why yes, Eirene will be with us—would make a point of being with us. Hasn't she the positive privilege? Even if it were not a pleasure, dear boy, to share your friends, it would be little short of a duty. And Miss Bolsover is coming too. It will be quite a pleasant little party for Miss—Miss Simcox."

She paused once more, but this time paused in vain. "Go on then, my dear boy, as fast as ever you can, getting *better*!" she harangued him. "The removal of almost every little misfortune in this life, except those that come from above, is merely a question of time."

Cecil sat up (physically speaking), and as she had prognosticated, that afternoon, and he went downstairs the next. But so assiduous were those who watched over his convalescence that, except after he had blown out his candle for the night, he was not for a moment left to mope alone. One can mope to some little purpose, however, in the gayest of company.

During the forty-eight hours that succeeded the sole, apart from those which passed in restless sleep, he enjoyed not a single moment of peace of mind. Nor was the faintest chance given him of bringing his inward conflict into the open. Short of speaking out, which every nerve in him forbade, he might drag one red herring after another across the trail in the hopes of leading Grummumma on. But she seemed to have lost all interest in the chase. How had she found him out? Did he talk in his sleep? How had she discovered Miss Simcox's name—and where she lived? What, *what* had she said to her? But Grummumma positively refused to budge. She believed that silence was best. Miss Simcox was never even mentioned again.

At a quarter to five, however, on the day before the tea party, and when Eirene was in charge, Cecil made his first and only frontal attack. His feverish cold had left its marks behind it. There was something unusually invalidish in the look of the young man when, without the faintest preparation, he suddenly blurted out his challenge. "I want—" he said, "Miss Simcox's address?"

"Cecil!" cried his remote cousin in unconcealed amazement, "you don't even know so much as her address!"

"No," said Cecil, "not so much as her address. And I want to write to her *now*."

"But, *my dear*, the creature will be here to-morrow afternoon. Surely you need not be so intemperate as all that."

The young man sat as still as a draper's model in his arm-chair. "I don't know what you mean by 'intemperate,'" he said, "and I don't much care. The point is, I want to write to her. And I want you to give me the chance of

doing so when Grummumma is not here. What's more, Eirene, if you breathe a word of what I am saying to a living soul—then, I assure you, you will regret it."

Eirene had never before heard trumpets in her cousin's voice and had never before noticed that he sometimes sat so motionless as to resemble not exactly granite, but at least Portland stone. Her hands clasped themselves in her lap. "I think it's perfectly monstrous of you," she cried lamentably, "to talk to me like that. Why, you are threatening me, Cecil! And who am I, may I ask, to be a skulking go-between? A nice kind of a creature this friend of yours must be to reduce you to that. I simply flatly refuse. Besides, I don't *know* her address."

"How did Grummumma find her out?" said Cecil. "Did *you* help?"

"My heavens!" shrilled Eirene. "And now you accuse me of being a spy! As if anyone like you isn't conspicuous a mile off. Even a shop-girl might have known that. I expect she did."

"And do you suppose I *mind* having been seen?" cried Cecil furiously. "But I'm not going to argue about that. You are merely misleading me. Please keep to the point. You swear you haven't her address?"

"I will swear nothing," said Eirene. "It isn't right. I *say* I haven't her address. And I simply don't care *where* she is—or ever will be."

"Then I believe you," said Cecil out of a horrible vacancy and yet as if he were conferring a royal favour. "But please understand, if you repeat a single word of what I said just now to anyone—well—we shall both of us be sorry for it."

Eirene rose to her feet. "To think," she sobbed, "that I should live to listen to this. Why, you must have known her for ages. She has corrupted every vestige of nice feeling you ever had. And you sit there without caring a fig what I suffer. I detest the very sight of you." She broke into a renewed flood of tears, and hastened out of the room.

Strangely enough, though her last remark was intended to be the truth, the frail creature had suddenly discovered that she was as near as she ever would be to being in love. In her frantic haste to be alone with her rage and resentment, she managed to push past Grummumma, who attempted to intercept her in the hall. She managed even to refrain from

enlightening that lady regarding the cause of the little scene she had been too late to interrupt. Grummumma, however, was by nature and habit a sagacious woman, and knew when to hold back. To have succeeded in pumping a little emotion into Eirene was almost as much of an achievement as to have succeeded in pumping whatever she had managed to pump into the mind of Miss Simcox. She awaited her little tea party with folded hands.

And almost before Cecil had any opportunity to realize that the tournament had begun, it was over. The odds had been appalling. The only ally of the young stranger had scarcely uttered a word. With eyes fixed now on the floriated of the drawing-room carpet, and now on Canon Bagshot's ecclesiastical hoots, Cecil had sat mutely listening to the talk. Indeed, no better prize could be offered in recognition of Grummumma's tactics than the fact that never at any moment was there any real opening for him. No kind of social gathering from a school treat to a *tête-à-tête* with a philanthropic duchess could exhaust Canon Bagshot's finesse. And Mrs. le Mercia had all her life apparently been an authority on the grievances of shop-assistants. Eirene, with her puffy hair, elegant hands, and pale, fine features, merely held a watching brief, though she saw to it that their guest was never without the creamiest and the chocolatest of the cakes for tea—just to give her something to do with her fingers while she tried to hold her own with her tongue.

As for "dear Miss Bolsover," she rolled her blue eyes and occasionally tapped with her blunt-toed shoe (but rather like a dog thumping its tail stump than a cat purring), and remained tactful to the last degree. If the parlour-maid had been given three guesses as to which of the party in the drawing-room had been responsible for the presence of the young lady in black in its midst, Miss Bolsover would almost certainly have been given the glory of being the last runner-up.

And the dark young lady herself—poor Cecil writhed in the consciousness that the fatal hindrance to any possibility of her enjoying this little parlour game was his own share in it. There was a cold, clear ring in her voice, as different from the others as a silver bugle is from a bassoon. She was being flayed alive, of course, as dexterously as a professional Chinese could have managed it. But then life, even

the few years she had enjoyed of it, had more or less accustomed her to the process. And it is miraculous how swiftly Nature can produce new skins. Besides, how much easier it is to endure any kind of torture, even that of tongues, in a good cause! And good cause it must be, since it was poor Cecil's, sitting there as dumb as a fish, and that out of water, in his dark-green shade. That he could hardly boast of being much in the way of a "young fellow" was proved by the elegant company she was keeping. That he therefore needed her championship the more was somehow proved by the fact that Canon Bagshot was at this moment urbanely stooping over her with a second cup of tea.

"I gather, then, Miss Simcox, the Roman Catholic Church is a little less intrusive than it is usually assumed to be."

"Though not, it seems," interrupted Grummma, "to the extent of allowing you to join a Guild in connection with a Sister Establishment. Otherwise, I understand, you are free to believe pretty much what you prefer."

Miss Simcox was at this moment doing her utmost to appear at her ease with a cup of tea in one gloved hand and the cream-clogged *éclair* that Eirene had hospitably palmed off on her with the other. "Oh, no, not *believe*," she cried almost brightly. "I thought you were referring to what it would be good for me to *do*."

"And surely," mused Grummma persuasively, "actions speak louder than words."

"But that's a proverb, isn't it?" suggested her visitor doubtfully. "I remember once hearing someone say that very thing to Father Browne; I forget what about." At her glance, Canon Bagshot hastily resumed the smile that had begun to fade away across his face.

"And what was Father Browne's reply?" he inquired indulgently.

"He said, in that case, one should take very good care not to deafen oneself."

"And what do you imagine, Miss Simcox, he meant by that?" inquired Mrs. le Mercier, with a roll of her fine eyes.

"Answers are useless," interposed Miss Bolsover, "that merely confuse things, and especially where principles are at stake."

"What do *you* think, Cecil?" continued Grummma,

swooping round on her grandson with the *télat* of a squadron of cavalry. "You are being remarkably silent this afternoon, even for you. Though no doubt you have discussed the question?"

The green shade shifted uneasily. "I suppose what Father Browne meant," Cecil faltered, "is that what one does is not necessarily a proof of what one is. At least one may hope not—always. I suppose motive counts, and that we can never really know one another. What's inside, I mean. The rest may be chiefly advertisement. But it's not much good asking me. I don't indulge in actions."

"Dear, dear, dear!" cried Grumnumma crisply, "deeper and deeper! I wonder what Canon Bagshot is thinking of such heresies."

She did not pause, however, to inquire, but at once turned the stream of conversation in the direction of the Shop Acts, and was presently assuring her visitor how much, *much* brighter she must be thankful to realize her lot in life now was, compared with that of the young ladies who worked in drapers' establishments twenty or thirty years ago, when there was no early closing, when no "assistant" was *ever* out on the streets until after ten o'clock, and on Saturdays—imagine it!—not before midnight. "The evils of such a system! And the living-in conditions!" She lifted her plump hands in horror from her lap. "They were, I understand, simply too dreadful for description. Anæmia, pernicious and otherwise, was rampant, I believe. And far worse things than anæmia! The Committee of which my dear father was Chairman was shocked beyond words. But now everything is changed. You are free, Miss Simcox, for a little pleasant gossip, are you not, almost at any hour of the day?"

The dark eyes of her visitor, from under her small black hat, watched every expression of the old handsome face. Except for a slight increase of pallor, her own showed no trace of the fires that were smouldering within. Her wits, too, a little more nimble perhaps than Grumnumma supposed them to be, were rapidly accustoming themselves to a method of attack with which they were not wholly unfamiliar. It would be as refreshing as a plunge into a cold bath to let these good people realize her real opinions of them—to give as good as she was getting, and so quietly too that "moddam" would remember it to her dying day.

Her glance wandered for an instant resolutely from face to face, passed on softly from flaxen Eirene's, then rested on Cecil. He was sitting with folded hands and downcast head as if, poor thing, this was a Home for the Feeble-minded and she herself was an applicant who could not afford the fees. If he had been a blind mute, he could hardly have looked more immobile. The angry flames within languished, went out. She felt suddenly limp and helpless and was just about to prove to Grummumma how swimming a victory was hers, when the groping figure in front of her pushed out his chin and remarked that if what Mrs. le Mercier had said were true, then men must be worse devils than he had thought possible. "If I had my way," he burst out passionately, "I'd burn the whole 'Parade' down."

"Exactly, my dear boy," retorted Grummumma, "and be off next morning (if you escaped the Police) to find another hatter and hairdresser and haberdasher. Oh, Cecil, Cecil! Miss Simcox is perfectly well aware, my dear boy, of her employer's difficulties. We have in this world to face things as they are. And civilization is impossible without give and take on all sides."

"Yes," cried Cecil ferociously, "and who does the taking, I should like to know?"

"But surely, dear lad," urged Canon Bagshot amiably, "we must not mix up things as they ought to be with things as they are. We must push gently on from one to the other. Progress is step by step, not by violent eruptions.

Not in vain (*he cleared his throat*), not in vain the distance beacons.

Forward, forward let us range:

Let the great world, spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.

That surely is not only poetry, but all that makes for sobriety and discretion. And are we not missing the whole point of what has been said? It is that the conditions of shop life have been very much *improved*. We are—I agree in only a small respect—*congratulating* ourselves. Is not that so, Miss Simcox?"

Miss Simcox had put down her cup once and for all at last. She glanced a little hesitantly about her. The green shade had lowered itself once more. Not a feature was

visible ; the delicate hands were clenched tight on the chair. "Shop life ?" she said, "Oh, yes !" And she looked at Canon Bagshot. "But then I don't see how people *can* know what other people's lives are really like. And what does it matter ? I am perfectly happy as I am."

"And *that*," said Grummumma, rising with an almost majestic urbanity, "is the most sensible remark I have heard for many a day. If every class and degree could say that, our difficulties would be at an end. My step-daughter—my grandson's mother—Mrs. Mortimer FitzKelly—once had a young nursemaid who . . ." With the amplest of smiles and the most elastic of gestures she had inserted herself between the two young people, and was already proffering her hand. Eirene had slipped over to the piano, in hasty search apparently of a suddenly remembered promise to perform. Miss Bolsover had already engaged the Canon in talk. The contest was over.

And at this precise moment Cecil dragged himself to his feet, as if to re-enter the lists. But in vain. He blundered forward only to find that Grummumma had exquisitely eluded him, and that their guest was already well on her way out—out of touch, out of hearing, even of hail.

His head twisted aimlessly on his shoulders, like a rusty smoke cowl in a breeze. A cloud swept over his dejected eyes. He turned irresolutely as if for help.

"You poor dear boy," cried Mrs. le Mercier, as she hastily re-entered the room, "I am afraid Dr. Lodge has been far too precipitant. You look positively worn-out."

But Cecil was already pushing his way out of the room. And as with hand upon the banisters he groped his way on from stair to stair, he caught only the last word or two of what Grummumma was saying : "Just a *soupsçon* of *savoir-faire*, poor little thing ; and she might be almost presentable."

It was Eirene who tapped at his door a few minutes later. She turned the handle, but in vain.

"Cecil, dear," a whisper came, "it's only me. Are you ill ? Is anything the matter ?" But since no answer of any kind sounded out of the vacancy beyond, there was nothing for it but to hope for the best.

Miss Simcox's champion can hardly be said to have appeared in shining armour. For an unconscionable time he



sat by his dressing-table, his hands clasped between his knees. He was attempting to think, to argue, to explain, to plan, and all this at the same moment. The result was little more serviceable than the rotations of a squirrel in a cage. Nor did the chattering of his teeth afford him any particular help in the crisis.

During the next few days, though never before in his memory had balms so gentle and precious been poured upon his head, Cecil realized that he was a prisoner closely guarded, with a family physician for chief warden. Of his two devotees, he much preferred Grumnumma. She at least made no attempt to suggest that she was an ally he had treacherously stabbed in the back.

It was the faint, far-away pathos in Eirene's tones, the gentle insinuations in her manner—"See how forbearing I am!"—that corroded every hour he spent in her company; while always between them lurked the remembrance, never referred to, that he had asked her help, had flung himself on her mercy, and that she had at least not given him away. She had so little given him away, indeed, that every touch of hand and wooing cadence of the grieved voice assured him that she was in fact keeping him entirely for herself. Moreover, what she and Grumnumma might have managed unaided was made the more easy by the thermometer and the weather.

There was no doubt Cecil was ill, though the most distressing of his symptoms—the mind that revolved on and on in anguish at his own helplessness—remained concealed. It was a helplessness, none the less, awaiting only the very shadow of an opportunity to break free.

About eleven o'clock on the Tuesday morning after Mrs. le Mercier's unusual visitor had come and gone, the clouds over Cecil's birthplace broke gently and then cleared completely away. It fell to Eirene to take him, well wrapped up and looking more like a hopeless invalid than ever, on his next constitutional. And Cecil chose for it a route exactly opposite to that which would have led them towards the shops.

"I often wonder," she began speculating, in her lately acquired plaintive tones, "what you really and truly think of people, Cecil. You always seem to me to have much more definite 'views' about them than most men of your age.

And they don't seem to be very high ones—the views, I mean. Why's that?"

"You mean," said Cecil, speaking out of the turned-up collar of his overcoat, "that as I can only see their lower halves, I cannot be any judge of their upper. You don't seem to realize that a person's character is scrawled all over him—over his boots even, rough-hew them as he will." The reply would have been almost sprightly if it had not sounded so bitter.

"You don't mean surely that cheap shoes and cotton stockings necessarily mean common minds? That would be *too* unfair."

"I mean," said Cecil stubbornly, "that what's bred in the soul comes out in the ankle. It's not merely what a person puts *on* his feet, but how he uses them. Besides, aren't there laces and buttons and buckles and so on? Don't we walk? Compare the kindly cow with the gazelle. And my God, Eirene, you don't suppose I can't even see up as far as the breast-bone where the hollow is where the heart should be?"

"I really don't know what's come over you," said Eirene. "It doesn't even seem to be yourself talking. You seem to have got so dreadfully clever and *never* to mean what you say. When you are not purposely misunderstanding one, you are—well, once you wouldn't have said, 'my God,' Cecil. And you used not to be *coarse*."

"No," said Cecil.

"And I didn't realize until this moment," she pursued, "that you were an expert in ankles and that kind of thing. You remember how we once agreed that we could always guess in whose company Kitty had been by her manner. She just catches whoever's about," she added sportively, "a sort of social mumps or German measles. But I never noticed that in *you* before. Besides," and there was now a genuine hint of anxiety in her voice, "you don't look a bit better. You talk to me as if you hated me body and soul; as if you almost detested me—physically, I mean. And the whole time I am with you—and Auntie agrees—you appear to be thinking of something else. What is the good of it all? Do you suppose I have never had my own little disillusionments and am not perfectly thankful to have found out that they *were* disillusionments? Nothing I can do or say seems of the least good. Why, if you had even asked

my *help*—" the voice really faltered now, and fell silent.

But Cecil, unlike most young men, could not realize how disturbing an experience it can be to be walking in the street with a companion positively shedding tears. He just walked on. He continued meanwhile for a moment or two to explore what Eirene had said.

"I think," he replied at last, faintly but firmly, "I have had enough of this ridiculous imitation street. And I hate the mock. We'll turn back."

There was little of the war-horse apparent in him as he wheeled. His mind had none the less suddenly cleared. It was finally made up. And he stepped out before his companion as if they had once and for all arranged the future between them. At the gate—the bland, white face of Grummumma's house flinging its reflected sunshine in their faces under the low, delicate, pale blue arch of the sky—Eirene paused. "You mean," she said with a choking voice, "that you would prefer me to be—*not* to be a friend. Well, so be it, Cecil. I can't help myself. I must just bear it. But you shall find that I *am* in spite of you."

This pathetic challenge, however, only served to consolidate Cecil's resolution. At three o'clock in the afternoon Grummumma was accustomed to shut herself up in her bedroom for half an hour—to relax. She relaxed inch by inch, and then the complete area. It was Eirene's turn to be sentinel again. She now sat playing very plaintive Mendelssohn in the drawing-room with the door wide open, and most of her attention, if not her actual eye, fixed on the staircase that descended into view beyond it. Cecil had left her there after lunch, and, as she had expected, now sat in his own room, drinking in the winning strains.

At half-past four he sent word by the parlour-maid that he would not be down to tea; and Grummumma having returned from relaxing, the two confederates nibbled their thin bread and butter in secret, and exchanged policies. None the less, as if a bird in the air had carried the note, Cecil with docr ajar realized the trend of their hushed talk, though he was honestly beyond the possibility of catching any single word of it. "What was to happen now?" he was thinking, the eyes in his aching head fixed upon his tea-cup. At half-past five Grummumma went out. Eirene was evidently doing double duty.

At a quarter to seven Mr. Mallow, Canon Bagshot's latest curate, looked in, with a new novel from Mudie's under his arm. This, he assured Eirene so eagerly that he might himself have been its author, was well worth reading. "There's so much clap-trap, so much positive slush published nowadays," he asserted, "that any piece of fiction with a trace of conviction in it—and I don't mean necessarily moral conviction—just conviction, is something to be thankful for. One must face the facts."

It was at this moment that Cecil came groping silently down the staircase, as if he were a thief in his own house, breaking not in, but out. Mr. Mallow was possessed of a resonant voice, a gift that is singularly fortifying when a slim, fair, and possibly slightly feline young woman is sharing its charms. The young man on the other side of the drawing-room wall now had his ungloved fingers on the latch.

"Face the facts?" Eirene was trembling. "How very interesting, Mr. Mallow. I should love to read it. There are some novels, you know, that really are rather awful. Still, I *believe*," she opened her blue eyes wide just to show how much she meant it, "I believe I almost prefer some of my facts done up in pretty paper. Is that *very* weak of me? *Men* like things so dreadfully bare!"

Cecil was so much engrossed in his private affairs that he did not pause to wonder why Eirene never talked with this particular timbre in her voice in her intercourse with himself. Mr. Mallow's robust tones broke out once more. "You see, dear young lady, nowadays novelists may be said to be divided into three camps. On the one hand we have these deplorable realists who think that by calling a spade a spade they are bound to use, and are justified in using, the most deplorable language. On the other we have what I should call the serio-sentimentalists, who try to show life devoid of shadows and who therefore cannot see it whole. And last we have the Shocking School merely out to pull any leg that shows. As for the Feminists—but I am not suggesting, of course . . ."

But Cecil had by now released the catch of the lock and the heavy door had been softly shut behind him. He was free. And his own desperate desire now was to make that freedom secure. It being Professor Flaxman Smith's parlour-

maid's afternoon out, she was given no opportunity to open her bright blue eyes wide with astonishment at the sight of "that young Mr. Jennings" positively running, even though at best it was but a shambling run. But he was covering the ground.

All the peculiar paraphernalia of his life—cracks in the pavement, little windy orgies of dust and straw and dried dung, that same dust stilled and sodden after the night's rain, hairpins of every shape, metal, size, and degree of elegance, dead leaves, running ants, scraps of paper, sparrows, drowsing cats, questioning dogs, area railings, basement bars, cooks, kitchen tables, meat on them, fires in summer—all these phenomena now floated past his down cast eyes unheeded. It was Thursday. It was Early Closing Day. With nothing but a name in his mind, and no address, with only the most meagre of hopes in the old trysting-place, he hastened on, determined that unless somehow or other Grummumma managed to circumvent him, he was going to assure himself of one single thing before he returned home. What exactly that thing was, he did not attempt to put into words. He wanted to say something, but first he must find the human being whom he wanted to say it *to*.

If the rather starchy-looking, blue-spectacled, elderly Cecil Jennings of thirty years later had ventured out on a similar quest, he would have had an extra hour of daylight, of Summer Time, to help him. This particular evening Cecil's allowance of light was by that much the more brief. But the skies were fair, the air was fresh and gentle. And after a narrow escape from being run over by a brewer's dray, he safely circumnavigated the rectory garden wall, and when he had pushed on along the river path to within a few hundred yards or 'so of the row of bright green lime-trees, immediate risk of recognition was safely over.

The quality of the town were not accustomed to enjoy the river path at so late an hour. Maybe too because the day was Thursday and its usual frequenters were farther afield, or maybe because fortune was for that one evening in league with him, very few wayfarers indeed were about. The flowers of the dying grass from the first hay-swathes in the meadow beyond the stream burdened the air with their strange sweetness. Swallows with tiny clash of beak and *skirr* of wing were hawking up and down the placid water ;

gnats in their dervish dancing drifted softly in every caprice of the breeze.

With little breath left either in body or spirit, Cecil came to a standstill. His mind was like a deflated balloon. The whole brave venture had suddenly become the stupidest goose chase. What preposterous self-confidence had brought him here? What justification, for that matter, had he for being a mere makeweight in the world at all? The burning heart had suddenly become like lead within him. An ailing half-wit dazzled by a shop-girl—the miserable folly of it all! The very beauty of the scene was a mockery and a sneer.

And now that the little sacred wooden bench would soon come within hail, every vestige of confidence forsook him. He felt as helpless and forlorn as a butterfly perishing in the vain attempt to extricate itself from its chrysalis skin. In the innocent hope of disguise, he had crammed on to his head an old soft hat discarded at least five years before. Nor were his clothes of his latest punctilious cut. It was no use. The whole attempt was fatuous. Nothing he could ever do would carry him farther than half way. He might as well return to the High Street and apply at the Town Hall for a list of drapers and landladies and knock them up one by one. After the deliberate insult of that tea party, even if he were successful, would she so much as consent to speak to him again? He buttoned his coat, shifted his eye-shade a little from the fretting line it had in his haste bitten into his forehead, and plodded on.

The lime tree was already disclosing the buds of its green-gold dangling racemes that would in a day or two be filling the air with a liquid sweetness as delicious as that of the withering grass. Here and there circlets of ripples showed where rising fish had rent the silken surface of the water. The river flowed on under the evening skies without haste between its banks. Summer comes, and goes. How was it possible that, only a few days before, this lovely, gentle, melancholy retreat had shown him a glimpse of Paradise, a paradise ablaze with lightning and shaken with thunder. The very bench, its timber still dark with a shower that had fallen, was eloquent with deprecation.

It was anguish to linger here, useless to venture farther, futile to go back. He must just give the problem up, that was all. And all this concern, this fatuity, interjected a

sardonic voice (and one not entirely unlike Grummumma's), from somewhere within his mind—all this for the sake of a green-sick shop-assistant! A young woman ineligible even for the parochial Guild. A horrid Jesuitical Catholic! A Catholic, too, who for curiously conscientious reasons had only just escaped becoming the wife of one of the young puritans of the "Parade." He listened with absolute calm to this harangue, as he stood leaning against the trunk of the tree. "But it doesn't matter, my dear," he muttered as if in hope his whisper might penetrate to the ear of the secret Dryad slumbering beneath its smooth, dark rind. "Nothing in the world would matter if only you would come!"

Humanity for the most part is so confident in the skill of its senses that it seldom realizes how severe are their limitations. Not to be able to divine where the long-sought-for lost thing lies concealed in one's own small earthly house; not to be able to see through even a sheet of paper; not to be aware that one's nearest and dearest at but a hundred paces' distance is in deadly danger; not to hear the faintest echo of the burning or icy thoughts in a close companion's mind—such is man's queer fate in his inexhaustibly rich environment. And yet poor Cecil never regretted the agony of the next few minutes of irresolution and despair, even though, as he was to discover when they were over, it was only a universal insensitiveness that was keeping him unaware.

Unaware, that is, that not twenty yards distant, and seated on the damp grass on the shelving bank of the river, her hands clasping her knees, was the young woman he longed for, her head turned towards him at an acute angle, her dark, quick eyes drinking him in. It seemed that she had made up her mind to give him time, and to give him his own time. Without otherwise stirring, she turned her head away again, and once more steadily surveyed the flowing water.

The narrow cheek bones under the low brow and the straight black eyebrows were as pale as ivory in the reflected light of an almost colourless sunset. It was in part the usual pallor of shop life and in part the result of poor food and indifferent sleep. But then ivory itself does not take to itself this particular bloom until the animal that grew it has gone into the dark. Peace itself to be sitting here now after the awful conflict, inward and outward, of the last few days.

Other battles had left ugly indelible scars, and yet she had come through—what was left of her. The long agonized inward conflict of the last few days was over. All was lost. And yet the world had never looked so lovely, so hard to abandon, nor had she herself ever been so utterly at rest. She had never much cared what became of her not at least until that absurd morning when her missing glove had been all but restored. And now, after a black, exhausting night, when dreams in the shallow sleep that had at last closed in upon her mind at the first cheeping of the sparrows had only increased her torments by a conviction of hopeless inefficiency, she knew exactly *what* was to become of her. But she had never for an instant foreseen that in the meantime she would meet again the one human being who had been the final cause of her decision.

Already in the waning light her face appeared a little duskier, its grave scrutiny fixed on that profoundly lustrous and fluid looking-glass. She speculated how deep it actually was; smiled inwardly at the thought of how shallow it need be. She gazed across the sliding water and watched a moment with a curious spiritual greed in her eyes the haze-swathed fields with their fringe of solemn and gigantic elms. Her nostrils quivered as if with a suppressed sigh or shudder as she breathed in the honey of the first few linden flowers. It was a mysterious thing to be alive, or rather, not so much to be alive as to be one's only means of sharing all this. When she was gone it would be all gone too—except, of course, what might come after. And she hadn't much time to think very closely about that.

Still, she was quite accustomed to finding pinned on with a midget pin in the corner of every scrap even of machine-made lace or the flimsiest of handkerchiefs that she proffered across the counter its precise price to the uttermost farthing. So she was unlikely to fail to realize that not only whatever happens in this world, but whatever one is responsible for in it, and buys or sells of oneself, has had affixed to it its own price also. And that, too, to the uttermost farthing. And yet it was a luxury to feel her hands clasped round her bony shins and to be huddling like this with her limbs and body close together in this quiet, rain-soaked grass that would certainly teach her all in good time not to be so imprudent. An overwhelming remorse for the fate of her own body



suddenly swept over her. It would be a pity to waste it.

And then, very cautiously, stealthily almost, as if even the soundless grinding of one sinew of the neck against another might be audible in this intense hush of evening, she turned her head once more and surveyed the stiff, awkward-looking shape now humped up so inanimately on its wooden bench under the tree. It would be silly, as well as unkind, perhaps, to keep him there any longer. She gave a little sort of nod at the water, much the same sort of little nod that she was accustomed to give when she had jotted down the total of a customer's bill on the piece of cardboard at the end of her shop-book. Then she rose, stole up the bank, and went over to where Cecil was sitting.

"Good evening," she said close to him. "Here's a bad penny, you see."

His whole body turned round in her direction. He thrust out his hands as if to ward off an unexpected enemy. But she made no move to reassure him.

"I didn't know you were there," he said. "Is there anybody else near?"

She laughed softly. "So you have discovered at last, then, that I am not the kind of person to be seen with."

He rose to his feet and stood perfectly still, his hands trembling a little in spite of himself.

"I could say things like that too," he replied, "but I should hate myself for doing so."

"Which might be," she retorted, "the beginning of a perfectly horrid quarrel. But I didn't mean anything at all. I just said it. One must say something. I learned that the other day."

"This is all so horribly open," said the young man, sweeping his cane round with an incredibly magnificent gesture as if in proof of it. He might be Satan himself, surveying from his mountain-top the outstretched Kingdoms of the World. "Could we go on a little farther, do you think?"

"Father!" she answered. "To Land's End, if you like—if we could. But I've got to be out of the streets by ten, or say eleven, or I shall be on them for good on Monday."

"I never knew anyone," said Cecil, "who had such a dreadful way of telling the truth. You must be very young for that."

An inexhaustible serenity seemed to have descended upon him. It seemed that he hadn't an enemy in the world, that before them lay an infinity of space fenced in only by an infinity of time. "If you only knew what I feel at being with you again," he muttered. "I have been waiting for you for ages. But had—had given you up. I have been kept in again, you see—idiot that I am."

"Well," she said in a curiously flattened voice, which yet seemed to conceal an intensity of music, "never mind that! Here I am. I don't mind, I don't mind even if you have been at death's door, as long as you too are with *me* again. You see, I am always more or less contented when I haven't any decisions to make. I am sick of them, but there are none left now."

She smiled to herself as fondly as a beauty at the image in her glass. "I didn't suppose I should see you again, and yet even impossibilities come true sometimes." She turned her head away and went on with an effort: "You see, I couldn't pretend I'm sorry to see you. I ought to. But nothing now, nobody in the world—or out of it either—could make me say that." Once more she twisted about. "Is *that* a common and horrible way of telling the truth? Like losing a whole boxful of gloves, I suppose."

"You never say anything," he replied gently, conscious it seemed, while they loitered slowly on, of every saw-edged, exquisite blade of grass stooping green under the evening sky and here and there laden with a drop, a crystal universe, of rain-water—"you never say anything without saying something different immediately after. I don't see, I mean, why you should always give a sting to everything. Mayn't we be—just friends, for now? You see," he hastened on, "I want to speak to you very badly indeed. I have got to make plans. And I am wondering if you would help me."

"Where did you leave Mrs. le Mercier," she inquired, "and—and that other young lady? I enjoyed that tea party. But I had, of course, *heard* of Canon Bagshot before—often. He's a little like a vulture, isn't he?"

"I have left them at home," he answered amiably, "or rather, Grummumma will be at home by now."

"Will they be sending a rescue party do you think—from the street girl?"

"Oh," he said helplessly, "you will just break me in pieces

if you go on talking like that. You don't know what I have been through these last few days—knowing what you must have thought of me. I deserve it all."

For the moment Miss Simcox made no reply. Her inward glance had vaguely returned with a wry little grimace to scan the vista of her own last few days; but she was not going to say anything about that. Instead, and as usual for no clear reason, a flush of colour slowly spread over her pale face. She could feel the heat of it as she blurted out, "Then you've missed me? *Missed* me—missed *me*?" With a wrench she regained her self-control. "Well, then, all I can say is, that I've missed you too. I mean, if you are kind enough to talk to me, I *like* talking to you. In the whole of my life I have never talked to anyone like you. I mean that I have never really talked before to *any* one, and that I have never talked to anyone like *you*. Do you see *now* what I mean?"

"I hear what you say," said Cecil in despair. It was odd that anything so substantial as the ground upon which they were walking should seem to be at least as precarious yet as buoyant as the water of which it was the restraining buttress. "I can't think what you can find in me," he added lamely.

"And me?"

"I don't find anything. I *am* you. You are *here*." As if even the sweet, pure air of a summer evening might be a little suffocating in certain conditions, his companion had lightly touched her throat with outspread fingers. "Do you," he went on hastily, "do you understand what I mean?"

He came to a standstill, gesticulating with his hand as if over a mathematical problem. "The moment you come, my mind is like another place. I have never seen anything of this before—this green, this loveliness, that water. I don't even know what they are; they have gone back to their own secrets, as, do you remember—when you were a child? . . ." Her only answer to that was a vigorous, tragic little nod he couldn't see.

"Don't let me say any more about that," she went on with a shudder. "There are worse things than *not* seeing. . . . I wonder if, do you think, just for this once I might take your arm? I assure you there is not a soul in sight now. There was a blackbird calling on the other side of the river a moment ago, and just now I saw a bat in the air.

Up there is the first star. Do you understand what *I* am saying? All it means is that I have gone to heaven—before I die!”

She had slipped her ungloved fingers through his arm, and the pair of them paced on towards—though they did not know it—towards the sea, and not towards the source of the river. They looked just like what they were—two commonplace sweethearts aimlessly wandering on together. And a sentimental passer-by might have thought how pleasant it was that a young man so severely handicapped should yet have been able to find a future helpmate.

But then this kind of foolish self-sacrifice is expected of the gentler sex, though as a matter of fact there was an odd suggestion of the masculine in the way in which this silk-shaded young man's companion walked along, beside him. There was a hint almost of the athlete in her every movement this evening, which is only to say, after all, that even in the indifferently nourished bodies which civilization is so freely responsible for, some spring of the wild animal may still remain.

The two people went on in an eternity that was a moment until they had reached a point where a few silver birches and hazels thinly screened them from the world they had for that moment left behind them. There the young woman came suddenly to a standstill.

“I must go back in a minute,” she said. “And if you don't mind, I would prefer to go back alone. Meanwhile we are here, and even a little time is a long time when there's not much left.” She laughed softly.

Irrked by the obstacle of the rooty bank at this bend, the water gurgled as if in echo of a never-ending lullaby. At least to some ears it might sound so, though for Cecil it resembled the monologue of a hopeless voice babbling of everlasting darkness. “You have only just come,” he said, “and now you talk about saying good-bye.”

“I didn't wish to. I must.”

“Well, then,” he said, “all I am going to say to you is this; and would you please listen as patiently as you can? Without interrupting me, I mean. It's—it's nothing much.” He waved his fingers in the air, took a deep breath, and plunged on. “What I mean is this: I haven't very much money now, but I have some. A little income, you know,

only four or five hundred a year—but certain. It's horribly little to go on with, but even Grummumma can't keep me out of a good deal more than *that* in a few years' time. Can't. Apart from that, and I don't mind saying it a bit, she can't live for ever. I don't want her even to live as long as that. Honestly I don't. I wouldn't so much mind if she had driven me—just harassed me, you know. It would have done me good. But she's held so tight to the bit that my mouth's all covered with blood. I know what's gone on all along. It's her way, her self, her domination. *That's* what Scarlet Women are made of. I see it now even though they—well, that's what I *mean*. And I simply can't stand it any longer. Possibly I should have stood it—at least for some little time—if *you* hadn't come. If *you* hadn't come, I believe I should have gone on mouldering on like a suet pudding in a damp pantry. Oh, yes, I know what I am talking about all right! I saw a slice of that once—mildewed—on my own plate, when my nurse didn't think my eyes could see under the bandage."

Cecil breathed again. He paused. Then, "What I am saying is this," he went on tranquilly, "would you mind telling me how we can get married? I mean, what do they do? I don't mean the Canon Bagshot way. I know that's impossible. But isn't there some place where you can get married just for the time being, without, I mean, going to a church? And especially if you are a Roman Catholic. Couldn't we go to a church later on, don't you think, when we have got safely away? I want to get married to you *at once* if we can—if I may. And yet I don't think I have even told you I love you. I don't think there was any reason to say that. You must have thought me even a more unutterable idiot than you must think me if you think that. I don't want to be impatient. I mean, I don't want to vex you into saying, No—that is, if you *won't* marry me. You see, I am so dreadfully ignorant of all these things. But you said just now that if you weren't back in your home by eleven it would be the streets on Monday. What did you mean by that, please?"

It was ludicrous what a muddle the young man was in; and yet how easy his listener was finding it to sort him all out and to see exactly not only where the commas and semicolons ought to have come in this remarkable piece of oratory, but also the full stop, the "period" as she had been taught

to call it when she was (for a year or two) at school. That was before the drapery business set in. That was before her father went off with the other woman. That was before even the none-too-particular but good-humoured woman next door began to take care of her for a time and to learn her in certain ways how it is possible when the worst comes to the worst, to take care of oneself. But all this was quite a long, long, long time before she had met this young man with the green shade over his eyes.

There was the look almost of a half-witted creature on her face as she now stood staring at the water. And yet, like a singularly intelligent canary or like a singularly instinctive blackcap or mocking-bird, she was trying over—as rapidly as a Paganini might a phrase in Mozart—she was trying over half a dozen tunes in which to reply. She chose the hardest.

“When I was engaged—and never mind who—” she said, “we found out about getting married without a parson. He knew all about that. You go to what is called a Registry Office. We thought—we might have to. Do you see? It would, of course, have been everlasting damnation to me, if we had; or at any rate a good many centuries of Purgatory. And to you—why! Oh, don’t I *know* it!—it would be the dismalest and most horrible thing you ever conceived of doing in the whole of your life. No, no, I can’t marry you. I don’t wish to. Oh, no. Don’t let us waste this little time in talking of foolish things like that. I couldn’t marry you. I couldn’t. I don’t wish to. Not go down like that, after all you have been, and said. I don’t even mind confessing now—as you see!—that I thought all this out even after the first time we met on the Parade. It was vile of me, I know, but it’s my character. I always see ahead. From the very first instant. When you are in my—well, some girls wait for marriage, just for the chance. They even . . . But never mind; that’s all over now. Until you came I never had a friend—not a *friend*. Did you really think I would ever risk—when you knew everything—losing . . . Oh, you don’t seem to realize,” she suddenly turned on him, “how hopelessly, blindly unpractical and unwordly you are. You say you are a fool: well, you *are*. A fool in all that I’m *not*. I have been soaked in the other thing ever since I was born. If you asked me to go to the devil with you, I’d go—gladly.

But you wouldn't. And knowing that, I'd rather go alone. And yet, before God, I love you. I say, I love you. It breaks my heart to say it. I didn't know it was possible. I didn't know what it meant. And yet, though you won't, though you can't understand about the rest of me. . . . But don't listen to that. What's the use if I never could and never, never would say, yes. Just listen only to what I am saying now. I love you. It's spelt l-o-v-e." She gazed at the half-hidden face with an agonized smile. "And simply because of that, it must be—we must leave each other here. It's almost night now. Don't let us talk any more. But you *must* be able to see I couldn't go back with you now. My legs wouldn't bear me. And honestly I don't think I could manage to *say* good-bye. So would you"—a fantastic, almost jocular note had edged into her curious voice—a voice like that of a delicate instrument whose sound-box has somehow or other become cracked, muting the clearer timbre of the thing, "so would you please kiss me, and I'll be gone."

Cecil groped for the hand that hung limp and inert beside the old serge skirt. He lifted it, and looked at its fingers. He counted them. They were long and narrow-boned fingers, and belonging, as they did, not to her right hand, they were a little less marked with work.

"I don't want to tell you," he muttered as if to himself at last, and still examining them in the clarifying focus afforded by his shade, "I don't want to tell you how shockingly miserable you are making me. You think I am a coward. You don't believe I could ever do anything, ever break free. You say you love me—you *say* you do—but you don't believe in me, not at all. I might just as well be a child for all that you are saying. But then I know it can't mean anything. I mean, I know you couldn't help saying it, and I can't tell you what I think of you for *having* said it. But you see, what I feel is that if you are going to keep to what you say—even if after all you weren't utterly meaning it—then I *must* see your face. I couldn't kiss you until I had, and it may be more than I can bear, more than I can manage, I mean. There isn't any moon, either," he added helplessly. "Would you mind taking tight hold of both my hands?"

She flung her arms away from him, took a quick step backwards, stooping low, like a dangerous animal about to spring. "Do you mean you are going to try *that* horrible

thing—now ?” she cried at him. “Be quiet, do. You don’t know what you are saying. Be quiet, do. Here I am. All you can see. What *more* has anybody wanted. Oh, you won’t be content till you’ve skinned me to the very bone. Look at *me* ! Oh, you will hurt yourself. You said you might die. And,” her voice ran down the scale until she was scarcely more than whispering, “and now, pray, do you know what I look *like* ? I do. You should see the looking-glass my landlady gives me. *That’s* where I powder my nose !” A corrosive sardonicism had come into her voice. A look of fierce vindictiveness distorted her narrow face and her blazing disquieted eyes. “Oh, for God’s sake,” she said, “do try and be a little kind to me. There won’t be very much time for it, if you only knew.”

But Cecil had followed her up, and she could retreat no farther, unless she was to plunge at once into the swirling water a foot or two beneath the bank. He was lifting his chin with convulsive efforts and had thrust both hands on her shrinking shoulders as he did so. And at last, with a strangled sob, he found himself gazing eye to eye with this phantom of his dreams.

Strangely enough, he *had* been without the least expectation of what that face looked like. It hadn’t seemed to matter. And now that he was scrutinizing it, only half conscious of the appalling pangs which were darting from skull to spine, it was not as if he had merely recognized her, but as if this were the first face that as a mortal creature he had ever seen at all—a landscape, a garden, a marvel, before time, lovely, earthly, yet unbelievable, all-pitying, burnt up with pain, never to be forgotten, never to be exhausted, never to be understood.

And before he could make the slightest movement, she had taken him in her arms and had hidden his anguished and distorted and transfigured face on her breast. “Oh,” she cried. “How could you do it ! How dared you ! Oh, dear, my dear ! Oh, my dear, my dear, my dear ! Have a moment’s peace. Don’t you see it will be mine, too ?”

Cecil had lost ages ago all but the faintest remembrances of his childhood ; or rather, he had never let himself think about it. And now he had reached a momentary, yet eternal oblivion, though it was an oblivion fenced in by misery and pain.



"Listen," he said, drawing back at last, still clutching at her hands, "I know now what you meant just then; I know what you meant. You meant you had made up your mind to kill yourself to-night—to drown yourself *there*. Well, then, listen to me. You don't move an inch until you have sworn to me by the Holy Ghost you won't do it. Do you understand? I can't keep you, I know that. I only ask you to go away and to think it over, and to come back again here in the morning. I shall be here. But before you go, even if it's for ever—and surely you couldn't, you wouldn't treat me li'e that!—you will promise me not to do *that*. Not to be so hopelessly wicked, you understand. You simply couldn't do it, leaving me the burden."

The fingers in his grip seemed to consist of little else than thin bones. "There!" she cried into Space, "isn't that the Man all over. You don't know what you are condemning me to, you cruel boy. You don't *know*. If I told you," she went on rapidly, "that to stay here—to stay on this earth as I am—will be only to go from one thing on to another, pillar to post until . . . Do you suppose yours is the only tender-hearted Grandmamma in the world? Oh, if you knew how I long, and now of all times, to get away. And I believe even God would forgive me, if He has any longing left. Ah, well, you *don't* know. And what's the good of talking!"

"But you promise?" Cecil repeated. "For after all, you are not thinking of me. You haven't remembered what my life has been like—silly fop that I am."

"My dear," she sobbed brokenly, "your hands are all wet. I can't really see your face, but you are shuddering all over. I will take you home after all. We can walk well apart. . . . But no—no!"

"But you promise?" he repeated.

Her eyes strayed from the hideous pent-house shade to the dark, secret water.

"No," she said, "I cannot promise. . . . But there!—God helping me—I won't."

Nothing seemed to matter now. She knew all that she was. Every thought in her head seemed to have foundered in an unfathomable pit of darkness. "But you don't know what you are asking," he added again, with a sound that might almost have been taken for laughter. "You are asking

me to go on loving you, and that I don't see how I shall be able to bear."

She drew her hands gently away and stood for a moment quietly looking at her solitary companion, as if uncertain whether or not she had ever seen him before. But in a while the illusion cleared away and she realized where she was; the darkened wood, the secret gurgling water, the empty stairway sky.

"Listen," she said at last, stooping forward, her shoulders seeming to fold themselves a little together like the curve of a bird's wings. "Are you safe now?"

He nodded.

"Not in pain?" He shook his head in his agony.

"And you won't quite forget me?" He made no answer.

"Well, then," she went on earnestly, like a child repeating its catechism, "never forget that I came to the *end* of my life when you came to its beginning. I didn't know what it meant to love anybody. And I'd rather have gone. For you see, when you looked up at me, something came *here*—I can't explain. I . . ."

Nor did she ever come back to explain. The sun was riding high in the heavens next morning, and the scene around Cecil alive with its scintillating summer beauty—skylarks in the empty blue, butterflies wavering from flower to flower, the bosoming waters radiant with light—when, too much worn out with pain and hopelessness to pay any attention to such elusive and illusory promises, he realized at last that she was gone never to return, and he groped his way back to Giummumma and his life.



KATHERINE MANSFIELD

*Mr. and Mrs. Dove*

Katherine Mansfield was the daughter of Sir Harold Beauchamp, of New Zealand, and wife of J. Middleton Murry, the literary critic. In her comparatively short life she wrote a number of beautiful short stories which entitle her to a high place in modern literature.



## MR. AND MRS. DOVE

OF course he knew—no man better—that he hadn't a ghost of a chance, he hadn't an earthly. The very idea of such a thing was preposterous. So preposterous that he'd perfectly understand it if her father—well, whatever her father chose to do he'd perfectly understand. In fact, nothing short of desperation, nothing short of the fact that this was positively his last day in England for God knows how long, would have screwed him up to it. And even now. . . . He chose a tie out of the chest of drawers, a blue and cream check tie, and sat on the side of his bed. Supposing she replied, "What impertinence!" would he be surprised? Not in the least, he decided, turning up his soft collar and turning it down over the tie. He expected her to say something like that. He didn't see, if he looked at the affair dead soberly, what else she could say.

Here he was! And nervously he tied a bow in front of the mirror, jammed his hair down with both hands, pulled out the flaps of his jacket pockets. Making between £500 and £600 a year on a fruit farm in—of all places—Rhodesia. No capital. Not a penny coming to him. No chance of his income increasing for at least four years. As for looks and all that sort of thing, he was completely out of the running. He couldn't even boast of top-hole health, for the East Africa business had knocked him out so thoroughly that he'd had to take six months' leave. He was still fearfully pale—worse even than usual this afternoon, he thought, bending forward and peering into the mirror. Good heavens! What had happened? His hair looked almost bright green. Dash it all, he hadn't green hair at all events. That was a bit too steep. And then the green light trembled in the glass; it was the shadow from the tree outside. Reggie turned away, took out his cigarette case, but remembering how the mater hated him to smoke in his bedroom, put it back again and

drifted over to the chest of drawers. No, he was dashed if he could think of one blessed thing in his favour, while she . . . Ah! . . . He stopped dead, folded his arms, and leaned hard against the chest of drawers.

And in spite of her position, her father's wealth, the fact that she was an only child and far and away the most popular girl in the neighbourhood; in spite of her beauty and her cleverness—cleverness!—it was a great deal more than that, there was really nothing she couldn't do; he fully believed, had it been necessary, she would have been a genius at anything—in spite of the fact that her parents adored her, and she them, and they'd as soon let her go all that way as . . . In spite of every single thing you could think of, so terrific was his love that he couldn't help hoping. Well, was it hope? Or was this queer, timid longing to have the chance of looking after her, of making it his job to see that she had everything she wanted, and that nothing came near her that wasn't perfect—just love? How he loved her! He squeezed hard against the chest of drawers and murmured to it, "I love her, I love her!" And just for the moment he was with her on the way to Umtali. It was night. She sat in a corner asleep. Her soft chin was tucked into her soft collar, her gold-brown lashes lay on her cheeks. He doted on her delicate little nose, her perfect lips, her ear like a baby's, and the gold-brown curl that half covered it. They were passing through the jungle. It was warm and dark and far away. Then she woke up and said, "Have I been asleep?" and he answered, "Yes. Are you all right? Here, let me—" And he leaned forward to . . . He bent over her. This was such bliss that he could dream no further. But it gave him the courage to bound downstairs, to snatch his straw hat from the hall, and to say as he closed the front door, "Well, I can only try my luck, that's all."

But his luck gave him a nasty jar, to say the least, almost immediately. Promenading up and down the garden path with Chinny and Biddy, the ancient Pekes, was the mater. Of course Reginald was fond of the mater and all that. She—she meant well, she had no end of grit, and so on. But there was no denying it, she was rather a grim parent. And there had been moments, many of them, in Reggie's life, before Uncle Alick died and left him the fruit farm, when he was convinced that to be a widow's only son was about the

worst punishment a chap could have. And what made it rougher than ever was that she was positively all that he had. She wasn't only a combined parent, as it were, but she had quarrelled with all her own and the governor's relations before Reggie had won his first trouser pockets. So that whenever Reggie was homesick out there, sitting on his dark veranda by starlight, while the gramophone cried, "Dear, what is Life but Love?" his only vision was of the mater, tall and stout, rustling down the garden path, with Chinny and Biddy at her heels. . . .

The mater, with her scissors outspread to snap the head of a dead something or other, stopped at the sight of Reggie.

"You are not going out, Reginald?" she asked, seeing that he was.

"I'll be back for tea, mater," said Reggie weakly, plunging his hands into his jacket pockets.

Snip. Off came a head. Reggie almost jumped.

"I should have thought you could have spared your mother your last afternoon," said she.

Silence. The Pokes stared. They understood every word of the mater's. Biddy lay down with her tongue poked out; she was so fat and glossy she looked like a lump of half-melted toffee. But Chinny's porcelain eyes gloomed at Reginald, and he sniffed faintly, as though the whole world were one unpleasant smell. Snip, went the scissors again. Poor little beggars; they were getting it!

"And where are you going, if your mother may ask?" asked the mater.

It was over at last, but Reggie did not slow down until he was out of sight of the house and half-way to Colonel Proctor's. Then only he noticed what a top-hole afternoon it was. It had been raining all the morning, late summer rain, warm, heavy, quick, and now the sky was clear, except for a long tail of little clouds, like ducklings, sailing over the forest. There was just enough wind to shake the last drops off the trees; one warm star splashed on his hand. Ping! —another drummed on his hat. The empty road gleamed, the hedges smelled of briar, and how big and bright the hollyhocks glowed in the cottage gardens. And here was Colonel Proctor's—here it was already. His hand was on the gate, his elbow jogged the syringa bushes, and petals and pollen scattered over his coat sleeve. But wait a bit. This



was too quick altogether. He'd meant to think the whole thing out again. Here, steady. But he was walking up the path, with the huge rose bushes on either side. It can't be done like this. But his hand had grasped the bell, given it a pull, and started it pealing wildly, as if he'd come to say the house was on fire. The housemaid must have been in the hall, too, for the front door flashed open, and Reggie was shut in the empty drawing-room before that confounded bell had stopped ringing. Strangely enough, when it did, the big room, shadowy, with someone's parasol lying on top of the grand piano, bucked him up—or rather, excited him. It was so quiet, and yet in one moment the door would open, and his fate be decided. The feeling was not unlike that of being at the dentist's; he was almost reckless. But at the same time, to his immense surprise, Reggie heard himself saying, "Lord, Thou knowest, Thou hast not done *much* for me. . . ." That pulled him up; that made him realize again how dead serious it was. Too late. The door handle turned. Anne came in, crossed the shadowy space between them, gave him her hand, and said, in her small, soft voice, "I'm so sorry, father is out. And mother is having a day in town, hat-hunting. There's only me to entertain you, Reggie."

Reggie gasped, pressed his own hat to his jacket buttons, and stammered out, "As a matter of fact, I've only come . . . to say good-bye."

"Oh!" cried Anne softly—she stepped back from him and her grey eyes danced—"what a *very* short visit!"

Then, watching him, her chin tilted, she laughed outright, a long, soft peal, and walked away from him over to the piano, and leaned against it, playing with the tassel of the parasol.

"I'm so sorry," she said, "to be laughing like this. I don't know why I do. It's just a bad ha-habit." And suddenly she stamped her grey shoe, and took a pocket-handkerchief out of her white woolly jacket. "I really must conquer it, it's too absurd," said she.

"Good heavens, Anne," cried Reggie, "I love to hear you laughing! I can't imagine anything more——"

But the truth was, and they both knew it, she wasn't always laughing; it wasn't really a habit. Only ever since the day they'd met, ever since that very first moment, for some strange reason that Reggie wished to God he under-

stood, Anne had laughed at him. Why? It didn't matter where they were or what they were talking about. They might begin by being as serious as possible, dead serious—at any rate, as far as he was concerned—but then suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, Anne would glance at him, and a little quick quiver passed over her face. Her lips parted, her eyes danced, and she began laughing.

Another queer thing about it was, Reggie had an idea she didn't herself know why she laughed. He had seen her turn away, frown, suck in her cheeks, press her hands together. But it was no use. The long, soft peal sounded, even while she cried, "I don't know why I'm laughing." It was a mystery. . . .

Now she tucked the handkerchief away. "Do sit down," said she. "And smoke, won't you? There are cigarettes in that little box beside you. I'll have one too." He lighted a match for her, and as she bent forward he saw the tiny flame glow in the pearl ring she wore. "It is to-morrow that you're going, isn't it?" said Anne.

"Yes, to-morrow as ever is," said Reggie, and he blew a little fan of smoke. Why on earth was he so nervous? Nervous wasn't the word for it.

"It's—it's frightfully hard to believe," he added.

"Yes—isn't it?" said Anne softly, and she leaned forward and rolled the point of her cigarette round the green ash-tray. How beautiful she looked like that!—simply beautiful—and she was so small in that immense chair. Reginald's heart swelled with tenderness, but it was her voice, her soft voice, that made him tremble. "I feel you've been here for years," she said.

Reginald took a deep breath of his cigarette. "It's ghastly, this idea of going back," he said.

"*Coo-roo-coo-coo-coo*," sounded from the quiet.

"But you're fond of being out there, aren't you?" said Anne. She hooked her finger through her pearl necklace. "Father was saying only the other night how lucky he thought you were to have a life of your own." And she looked up at him. Reginald's smile was rather wan. "I don't feel fearfully lucky," he said lightly.

"*Roo-coo-coo-coo*," came again. And Anne murmured, "You mean it's lonely.

"Oh, it isn't the loneliness I care about," said Reginald

and he stumped his cigarette savagely on the green ash-tray. "I could stand any amount of it, used to like it even. It's the idea of—" Suddenly, to his horror, he felt himself blushing.

*"Roo-coo-coo-coo ! Roo-coo-coo-coo !"*

Anne jumped up. "Come and say good-bye to my doves," she said. "They've been moved to the side veranda. You do like doves, don't you, Reggie?"

"Awfully," said Reggie, so fervently that as he opened the french-window for her and stood to one side, Anne ran forward and laughed at the doves instead.

To and fro, to and fro over the fine red sand on the floor of the dove house, walked the two doves. One was always in front of the other. One ran forward, uttering a little cry, and the other followed, solemnly bowing and bowing. "You see," explained Anne, "the one in front, she's Mrs. Dove. She looks at Mr. Dove and gives that little laugh and runs forward, and he follows her, bowing and bowing. And that makes her laugh again. Away she runs, and after her," cried Anne, and she sat back on her heels, "comes poor Mr. Dove, bowing and bowing . . . and that's their whole life. They never do anything else, you know." She got up and took some yellow grains out of a bag on the roof of the dove house. "When you think of them, out in Rhodesia, Reggie, you can be sure that is what they will be doing. . . ."

Reggie gave no sign of having seen the doves or of having heard a word. For the moment he was conscious only of the immense effort it took to tear his secret out of himself and offer it to Anne. "Anne, do you think you could ever care for me?" It was done. It was over. And in the little pause that followed Reginald saw the garden open to the light, the blue quivering sky, the flutter of leaves on the veranda poles, and Anne turning over the grains of maize on her palm with one finger. Then slowly she shut her hand, and the new world faded as she murmured slowly, "No, never in that way." But he had scarcely time to feel anything before she walked quickly away, and he followed her down the steps, along the garden path, under the pink rose arches, across the lawn. There, with the gay herbaceous border behind her, Anne faced Reginald. "It isn't that I'm not awfully fond of you," she said. "I am. But"—her eyes widened—"not in the way"—a quiver passed over her face

—"one ought to be fond of—" Her lips parted, and she couldn't stop herself. She began laughing. "There, you see, you see," she cried, "it's your check t-tie. Even at this moment, when one would think one really would be solemn, your tie reminds me fearfully of the bow-tie that cats wear in pictures! Oh, please forgive me for being so horrid, please!"

Reggie caught hold of her little warm hand. "There's no question of forgiving you," he said quickly. "How could there be? And I do believe I know why I make you laugh. It's because you're so far above me in every way that I am somehow ridiculous. I see that, Anne. But if I were to——"

"No, no." Anne squeezed his hand hard. "It's not that. That's all wrong. I'm not far above you at all. You're much better than I am. You're marvellously unselfish and . . . and kind and simple. I'm none of those things. You don't know me. I'm the most awful character," said Anne. "Please don't interrupt. And besides, that's not the point. The point is"—she shook her head—"I couldn't possibly marry a man I laughed at. Surely you see that. The man I marry—" breathed Anne softly. She broke off. She drew her hand away, and looking at Reggie she smiled strangely, dreamily. "The man I marry——"

And it seemed to Reggie that a tall, handsome, brilliant stranger stepped in front of him and took his place—the kind of man that Anne and he had seen often at the theatre, walking on to the stage from nowhere, without a word catching the heroine in his arms, and after one long, tremendous look, carrying her off to anywhere. . . .

Reggie bowed to his vision. "Yes, I see," he said huskily.

"Do you?" said Anne. "Oh, I do hope you do. Because I feel so horrid about it. It's so hard to explain. You know I've never—" She stopped. Reggie looked at her. She was smiling. "Isn't it funny?" she said. "I can say anything to you. I always have been able to from the very beginning."

He tried to smile, to say "I'm glad." She went on: "I've never known anyone I like as much as I like you. I've never felt so happy with anyone. But I'm sure it's not what people and what books mean when they talk about love. Do you understand? Oh, if you only knew how horrid I feel. But we'd be like . . . like Mr. and Mrs. Dove."

That did it. That seemed to Reginald final, and so terribly true that he could hardly bear it. "Don't drive it home," he said, and he turned away from Anne and looked across the lawn. There was the gardener's cottage, with the dark illex-tree beside it. A wet, blue thumb of transparent smoke hung above the chimney. It didn't look real. How his throat ached! Could he speak? He had a shot. "I must be getting along home," he croaked, and he began walking across the lawn. But Anne ran after him. "No, don't. You can't go yet," she said imploringly. "You can't possibly go away feeling like that." And she stared up at him frowning, biting her lips.

"Oh, that's all right," said Reggie, giving himself a shake. "I'll . . . I'll—" And he waved his hand as much as to say "get over it."

"But this is awful," said Anne. She clasped her hands and stood in front of him. "Surely you do see how fatal it would be for us to marry, don't you?"

"Oh, quite, quite," said Reggie, looking at her with haggard eyes.

"How wrong, how wicked, feeling as I do. I mean, it's all very well for Mr. and Mrs. Dove. But imagine that in real life—imagine it!"

"Oh, absolutely," said Reggie, and he started to walk on. But again Anne stopped him. She tugged at his sleeve, and to his astonishment, this time, instead of laughing, he looked like a little girl who was going to cry.

"Then why, if you understand, are you so un-unhappy?" she wailed. "Why do you mind so fearfully? Why do you look so aw-awful?"

Reggie gulped, and again he waved something away. "I can't help it," he said, "I've had a blow. If I cut off now, I'll be able to—"

"How can you talk of cutting off now?" said Anne scornfully. She stamped her foot at Reggie; she was crimson. "How can you be so cruel? I can't let you go until I know for certain that you are just as happy as you were before you asked me to marry you. Surely you must see that, it's so simple."

But it did not seem at all simple to Reginald. It seemed impossibly difficult.

"Even if I can't marry you, how can I know that you're

all that way away, with only that awful mother to write to, and that you're miserable, and that it's all my fault?"

"It's not your fault. Don't think that. It's just Fate." Reggie took her hand off his sleeve and kissed it. "Don't pity me, dear little Anne," he said gently. And this time he nearly ran, under the pink arches, along the garden path.

"*Roo-coo-coo-coo!* *Roo-coo-coo-coo!*" sounded from the veranda. "Reggie, Reggie," from the garden.

He stopped, he turned. But when she saw his timid, puzzled look, she gave a little laugh.

"Come back, Mr. Dove," said Anne. And Reginald came slowly across the lawn.



W. B. MAXWELL  
*The Fairy Heliotrope*

W. B. Maxwell, the novelist son of a novelist mother ("M. E. Braddon"), has been writing since 1901. Among his recent successful novels, the best known are *The Concave Mirror*, *Amos the Wanderer*, and *This Is My Man*.





## THE FAIRY HELIOTROPE

As a child he always wanted to get out of his proper place. "Would you like a ride in a train?" an uncle might ask. "Oh, yes, if I may go on the engine."

At first it was amusing. As, for instance, when Grand-mamma was about to take him out for a drive in the barouche. "May I sit on the box?" "No, my pet." "Why?" "Because I say so," replied the old lady—to point a moral. Then, relenting, "Also, because Frederick wants the box seat."

The little dear would toddle out before his relative was ready, for a chat with the fat coachman and the tall footman; and then it would be, "G'mamma, I *can* go on the box after all. Fe'dick will sit inside with you. He does not mind, just for this once!"

But it became boring as the boy Richard grew older. It shocked and worried his mother—who was what is termed strait-laced—to find that he preferred the butler's pantry to her boudoir; that he considered shove-halfpenny with the grooms in the harness-room after dinner more entertaining than a game of billiards with the noblemen and gentlemen, her guests; that, while slighting the advances and underrating the companionable qualities of the son of the Lord Lieutenant of the County, he wooed, in a manner almost sycophantic, the society and friendship of the only child of the most notorious poacher in the neighbourhood. When the local constabulary, raiding the Bell Inn at twenty minutes to eleven o'clock at night, found him among the laggards in the Bell parlour so flagrantly long after closing hours, it was time—quite time—to send him to a crammer's. It is a fact that, in spite of his advancing years, he travelled to London and thence on again—in the guard's van.

The cramming establishment was near Smoketown in the north; and it counted among its pupils the son of the manager of the Smoketown Grand Theatre. To know such a man was a rare honour and privilege. The Grand Christmas

Pantomime, after a stupendously successful run, was now positively approaching its last nights and matinées when our young friend was first permitted to witness its performance spellbound from overture to fall of the green curtain. It was not until he had sat under the long-drawn-out spell on several occasions that his host called his attention to an entrancingly ingenious little door in the wall, situated immediately behind Box C on the prompt side of the house. It was the door through which one passed from one's proper place, the auditorium, to where one had no business at all, behind the scenes.

It need hardly be said that, like a rabbit bolting into its burrow, with the unobtrusive celerity of a bone-guilty dog leaving the dining-room, he nipped through that door.

Of all that enchanting place, he loved the cellars best. He was more thoroughly and satisfyingly in the way here, among the sinks and pits and curious beams and intricate ropes, blundering upon and jostled by grimy workmen, than when leaning against gas handles in the prompt corner or blocking entrances or aimlessly obtruding himself in the flies, the painting room, the property shop, the crowded scene docks. The orderly confusion, the controlled bedlam, the wild hurry and fierce rush and racket of the grand Christmas pantomime, when taken unawares in the rear and considered from the side which should be jealously guarded from public view, filled him with rapturous content. Strong as had been the spell which the right side of the show exercised, it was weak and breakable compared with the overpowering fascination of the wrong side.

But the cellars! To stand in those dimly lit mysterious vaults, lulled by the muffled strains of the band leaking to one through invisible passages, above one's head the stage itself—a dull grumble of the demons in Scene One—the Haunt of the Gnome King—with flashes of limelight filtering down through the wonderful boards! To think, as he did, that this was the true home and haunt of the demons—a more convincing cave of mystery and awe than the scene overhead! He would draw in his breath greedily, luxuriously. He would throw back his head, deeply inhaling the atmosphere of these lowermost regions—gaseous fumes, superheated vitiated air, a dancing pungent dust, and a faint, very faint, odour of drains—finding it more delicious than moor-

land breezes, sweeter than flower-scented gales. He loved the cellars best; and it was here, in a dark recess, a little innermost bin of private cellar formed by huge wooden baulks and beams and buttresses, that he suddenly came face to face with the Fairy Heliotrope.

A thrill of ecstasy ran through and through him; he felt hot and cold; he was dazzled, entranced, hopelessly, irretrievably spellbound by one flash of the fairy's eyes as she turned them full upon him.

She seemed at the moment like a beautiful bird caught in a trap, or a gentle innocent sprite fallen into the gross hands of the two ogres who, as he guessed at once, would presently hoist her up through the boards—to bounce out among the hideous gnomes assembled above. Up she would go, with a bang on the drum and a clash of the cymbals, while a broad shaft of limelight came down to meet her, and the evil spirits would cower with monstrous exaggeration and quail in pantomime terror as the radiant intruder delivered the lines which already he knew by heart.

"I am this infant's Godmamma, so please  
Attend to my directions—which are these."

Then, while the wicked gnomes continued to quail, she would recite, in the form of an incantation, this impressive stanza:

"In the sunlight, with no shadow,  
Please to guide her baby tread;  
While our fairy wings make music,  
Flying o'er her baby head.  
Smooth her path, and free from worry,  
Free from flurry, free from fuss,  
For we fairies are her guardians,  
And have made her one of us."

The mechanism of the trap was explained by the ogres themselves. Ropes, counterweights, and so on, it all seemed simple enough. "But, you see, sir, we have to take care, *fnake* the ropes run smooth and even like. It would be an easy thing to do her a mischief, you'll understand, whereas with *care*, we just runs her up so as she don't know she's gone."

"Not always," said the fairy, with large, reproachful eyes.

"Sorry to hear you say that, miss. Shook you up a bit Saturday night? I remember, now you mention it. The ropes wasn't properly greased, perhaps." Then, turning to the intensely interested visitor, in a confidential tone, "That's the whole secret, you'll understand, sir, to keep them ropes thoroughly well greased, and with the right stuff."

"What is the right stuff to grease them with?"

"Beer, sir. Nothing else. . . . Stand by, Bill. Ready? Steady now—go!"

The floor above her lovely head opened; through the square gap demoniac chatter, the music of the orchestra, and a flood of light descended. Then she rose, closing the gap with the little platform on which she had been standing, and he was left gaping in the blank darkness beside the empty trap. After fumbling in his pockets, he gave the ogres money—sufficient money to lay in a really ample supply of the lubricant. He did not wish them to do her a mischief if he could prevent them. Indeed, his heart turned sick and his hand trembled as he thought of harm coming to her.

"Ah!" said the fairy Heliotrope next time he met her, "come to keep me company, till I'm wanted? That's right. I do hate trap work, and I fairly loathe this cellar."

Her condescension, her friendly, affable tone, rendered him speechless in surprise and pleasure.

"It makes me shiver, this cellar. 'There's something about it that makes my flesh creep—as though it was haunted. I shouldn't wonder if it is'; and the fairy turned her graceful neck to one side and the other as she glanced about fearfully.

He was keenly anxious to tell her that the cellar had impressed him also as mysterious, awe-inspiring, weird and wonderful; but the glory and honour of the interview still deprived him of speech.

"Perhaps the big drum or the double bass committed suicide down here; or," dropping her voice to a whisper, "some of those brutes broke a poor girl's back in the traps, and her ghost walks."

Then, observing that the successors to the brutes of her imagination were well out of earshot, she added: "It was nice of you to tip them like you did. I thought it very nice, and I thank you."

He could tingle and blush with embarrassed gratification, but he could not find his tongue.

"What's your name?" asked the fairy Heliotrope.

"Richard."

"Oh, I mustn't call you that, you know."

"Then call me Dick."

"Very well," said the fairy, showing her white teeth and flashing her bright eyes in an overwhelming fairy-like smile. Never did poor peasant meet so free and easy a fairy!

"I think I had better call you Dicky; you are rather like a bird—a parrot," and she smiled again. "You don't talk much, but you think all the more."

It was surprisingly true. He felt that by her fairy arts she saw through and through him and could read his thoughts better than he could read them himself. "Well, good-bye, dicky-bird," she whispered, just before the ropes were pulled. The public claimed her and he was left in the darkness again.

"How old are you, I wonder?" said the fairy Heliotrope. "Is it true that you are still at school?"

"No," he cried, "it is a dastardly lie," finding a full volume of voice and a flow of strong words in his fierce indignation. "Who has dared to slander me so?"

She explained that it was the Knave of Hearts, the low, the very low comedian, and implored him not to be so angry. He, on his side, glibly quoting the lines about the blackest of all lies which is half a truth, explained the gulf, the sea, the wide ocean of difference that rolls between a school and a crammer's.

"Oh!" said Heliotrope.

"One is slavery, the other is absolute freedom," he urged hotly. "Should I be allowed to be here now, if I were—well, at what he ventured to allege?"

"Is it true what they say, about your park and the handle to your mother's name and all the land and the money which you are going to have?" asked Heliotrope.

"Yes," he said, with the candid pride of youth, "every word of it."

"And how old are you, really and truly?" the fairy asked thoughtfully.

"Eighteen," he answered, blushing deeply, and wishing that he could have bartered all the land up to the park rails, throwing in the maternal title, as exchange for another ten years.

"Oh, lor! And I am twenty-three. Old enough to be your aunt—almost."

"No," he said, inwardly surprised at the ease with which his tongue wagged this evening, "old enough to be my fairy godmother, if you like."

"Yes," said Heliotrope, as she took his hand in hers. They were alone together in the dark recess of an upper entrance, O.P. side. "That's what I'll be, dear. I can't be anything else, so I'll be that."

He hated the Knave of Hearts and regretted that he had ever laughed at his knavish vulgar buffoonery. He was a *low* comedian, he now thought, if ever there was one. It tortured him to observe the lack of deference in the Knave's manner when addressing the fairy; and there was a hard lump in his throat which almost choked him when he became aware that the fairy did not appear to miss the respect which was certainly her due.

"What's that?" she asked of the knave, who was raising his ugly painted face from an ugly pewter mug in the wings.

"Nectar! Ever tasted it? Try some!" and he offered the pewter and she delicately sipped out of it.

"What nonsense," she said, wiping her red lips. "It's stout."

"Guinness's, the same thing as what I alleged," said the low comedian, leering and grimacing as though he had made a joke.

It was after this distressing episode, so derogatory to a fairy, that he began to feed her himself; superintending her meals whenever possible and thereby making sure that no base-born rogue shared platter or glass with her. In the interval between the morning and evening performances he used to take her to the finest restaurant in Smoketown. She never caused him trouble by indulging in fairy-like fancies, asking for soup made of the hearts of black roses, followed by the three smallest of the goldfishes swimming about the fountain in the Municipal Park boiled in a *débutante's* first tears of delight at the beauty of her new frock, or anything ridiculous of that sort, but contented herself with plain, solid, matter of fact nourishment—a chop or steak—"well done, please, and a termarter if you have such a thing." Before accepting his hospitality she asked permission of her mother

(her mortal parent), which was at once accorded. In the long passage outside the stage door he saw the quiet, unobtrusive old lady and thought he heard her reply :

"Most certainly, of course ; yes, indeed, why not ?"

He used to sit looking at her across the restaurant table, trying and trying and trying to see her—seeing her so clearly and yet seeing her not at all. She was tall and slim ; her hair was brown ; her eyes were large ; her complexion was of a pale dull ivory tint—the carnation of the blood killed by the use of liquid rouge, the satin white of the skin turned to calico yellow by the stain of all the grease and vaseline. He looked harder and harder, but really he could not see her—because he loved her so.

She seemed to speak—whatever trivial everyday matter she spoke of—in measured cadences. She moved in music ; and she laughed in limelight. Her black straw hat, her brown retriever dog-skin jacket, her dull serge dress and two brilliant paste trinkets used to disappear while he looked ; and, in a glorious flash, she had resumed her fairy form. From the unpromising materials before him, he reconstructed her, reinstated her in her stage splendour, even in handing her a roll on a fork or refilling her wine-glass, and she took life again—the marvellous, entrancing, supernatural life of the fairy Heliotrope. And it was in that character that he loved her so intensely—so completely and in so satisfying a manner that when he left her and walked the muddy pavement of the smoke-mantled town, a soft diffused violet light at dusk made the very chimneys of the factories beautiful in his eyes ; while, as shadows deepened, a rainbow radiance issued from each street lamp, forming prismatic-toned circles on the black night ; and into each circle, to a wild throb of sweet music, as of fiddles playing on his heart-strings, while the blood in his veins drummed with a bang and his expectant yearning thought clashed against his natural common sense with a clash of cymbals, there leapt the fairy Heliotrope. He knew, while she thus came and went and came again, glowing and fading inside him, outside him, everywhere, that love of this excessive order can only be inspired once in a lifetime, once in a million lives, and then only by a fairy.

"I wonder whatever you take me for," she used to say with a note of sadness in her sweet voice ; "what do you



think I am, when you go on staring and thinking like you do?"

"A fairy," he used to answer.

"Well, you are wrong, dear. I'm not. I wish you'd get that out of your silly head—you make me almost wish I was, and half ashamed of myself for not being one."

Her very human parent used to nudge him, when they met, with her elbow. He used to smile—a terrible, worn-out, wicked old burlesque of Heliotrope's smile—and then very lightly dig him in the ribs. The vulgar phrase exactly fitted her friendly, playful action; which she would supplement with kindly little phrases—a tolerant proverb, a good-humoured quotation from the folk-lore of our islands. Boys will be boys—Handsomeness is as handsome does—anything soothing or encouraging without any particular application or obvious meaning.

He liked her naturally. He recognized that she was unconventional, of a different world to that of his own mamma; but he found no fault with her unconventionality. He liked the frank *bonhomie* of her words and gestures, and thought that she was, in her own original way, quite *grande dame*. In imagination he placed her, during a visit, on a particular sofa in the music gallery at home, on the occasion of a big dinner party, and was proud of her as a guest. But when, in this vivid mental picture, she began to nudge the fat wife of the Lord Lieutenant with one elbow and her hostess with the other, both these great ladies rose from the sofa with a constrained air and went across to the piano, and she was left nodding and smiling alone.

People who live all their lives in the country are so narrow-minded and prejudiced—he thought. Even the best of them!

She was not, however, altogether contented with him. "I am not unreasonable," she used to say, in confidential moments to other mothers and chaperons—to the faded aunt of the bouncing principal boy, to the female companion of the pretty princess. "But I *am* her mother. I have never swallowed chaff for grain, nor put up with nonsense, and I ain't going to begin now. I won't have her trifled with—would you, in my place? . . . What I say is—let him say plainly what he *can* do and what he *can't* do. Let him make some definite proposition."

At night she would angrily ask her weary, pale-faced fairy

if *he* had formulated his proposition ; and poor tired Heliotrope would compress her lips and shake her head in a sign of negation.

"Well, you may give him my compliments, and say, straight from me, that I don't intend to be fobbed off with choc'let creams and bookays much longer."

Poor fairy ! She loved chocolates and flowers so much, and disliked to see anyone crush even the most modest of nosegays and trample it under foot in anger.

Fairies are quite above ordinary rules of conduct and must not be criticized by mere mortals, or condemned if, in their fairy wisdom, they tell occasional fibs. It was certainly not true that he made no proposition. He made it again and again, in the most definite and least ambiguous form ; but her answer was always the same.

"No, and no, and no. Not this year, nor next year, nor some time, nor ever. Thanks all the same. I like you for asking me. I like you, my silent, thinking dicky-bird. I like you more and more, and it is because I like you that I know it isn't to be thought of. . . . Now tell me about that park of yours—and the deer and the river and the old bridges. And how long is it that you say you can ride a-cock-horse before you are off your own land?"

If her mamma had heard him as in imagination he beat the bounds of the family property, with the proud candour of youth making the best rather than the worst of it all, and then had heard him most definitely pleading that her child would come and reign as Fairy Queen over those broad domains, she would certainly have nudged him off his chair in her maternal gratification. . . .

Heliotrope was shivering now in the warm restaurant as well as in the cold cellar.

"I don't know what you have done to me," she said reproachfully. "It's all since I knew you. You've been giving me too many sweets. I'm not accustomed to them, and they've upset me. I never felt like this before. I could hardly get through this afternoon," and she shivered again.

"Feel my hand," she said. It was as cold as ice. "Now put your hand on my forehead." It was hot as fire. "And I don't seem to taste my food," she said, pushing her plate

away. "Let's sit by the fire and talk." In this no man's hour of meal-time, between ordinary people's tea and dinner, they had the room to themselves.

"Don't look so sad-like," said Heliotrope, stretching her hand towards the fire, while the flicker of the flame came and went on her pale face. "It isn't your fault, my dear, that I feel so bad. . . . See, it's that cellar. I do honestly believe it's haunted, and that the ghost has had a clutch at me; held me round the throat without my noticing it."

He put more coals on the fire. There was frost in the outer air, and the flames sprang upward with violet arms and crimson bodies, throwing her proper colour, as the heralds would say, upon the white face of Heliotrope. "I've had a hard life of it, Dicky," she said. "I've been through a good deal in my time . . . and yet, after all, come to think of it, I am not old. Not so much older than you, am I? Only twenty-three, all said and done. Don't be sad-like. . . . Why am I looking backward instead of forward? How odd you do things. Well, because the strips went on the bills to-day. 'Last nights,' you know. All over a-Saturday week. . . .

Good-bye, indulgent friends, and may I hope,  
You won't forget the fairy Heliotrope.

These were her final interjectional lines, just before the gorgeous, glittering transformation scene.

"There, there," she said, rising. "Care killed a cat. Help me on with my jacket."

She was still shivering while he wrapped the brown dog-skin about her slender shoulders, but she laughed her tinkling silver laugh now. Then, taking the lapels of his coat in her hands, she gently pulled him round as they stood upon the hearth until the violet-coloured flame lit up his face, and hers—for a change—was in shadow.

"Once more, you silly, silly dicky-bird," she said, laughing even while she spoke, "what do you *really* and *truly* think I am?"

"A fairy," he answered.

"I'm not," and the laugh changed to a sob, and for a moment she dropped her forehead on his breast. "I'm not, but I do wish I was. . . ."

‘Come,’ she said, laughing again. “I shall be late. . . .”

He knew now, pacing the frosty pavement beneath the windows of the darkened room where Heliotrope lay fading, all about the ghost of the Grand Theatre. He understood, at last, the secret of those dimly lit vaults. He had correctly supposed that the mysterious basement was a fitter, more convincing setting for the powers of evil than that painted scene above. The horrible cellar, as many an old mime knew, was in truth the dread haunt and home of the Demon Typhoid.

Her lodgings were over a baker’s shop, and in these days the baker abandoned the bakehouse and left counter and cart to take care of themselves, finding more profit in running his messages, carrying bulletins and collecting goods from his purveyors than could be fished from the channels of regular trade. He was not sleeping, nor eating, nor thinking; only fighting, without thought, as one in a dream, fighting day and night with the demon.

The electric sparks flashed southwards down the frosty, glistening copper threads; his messengers flew hither and thither beneath the dark smoke clouds which hung all day above the town. A train of straw wagons came grating and groaning over the frost-bitten stones. He made a silence in a place of noise. Even the city police stepped delicately on their midnight beat when they came upon him pacing to and fro in the cold moonlight beneath the windows, or laid finger on lip when they found him whispering in doorways with his sombre-cloaked ministers, the hospital nurses. There are moments when more may be reaped for a sympathetic look than you will ever harvest from stopping a runaway cab. Thus thought the cadgers and loafers and the permanently unemployed. Rich men must have their fancy, thought the people at the bank, at the post office, and the railway station. “He has passed completely out of my control,” wrote the tutor on a reply-paid form.

Greybeards and Snowypolls came from London and went back to London, and others came in their place.

Then, as what they had termed the crisis drew near, the electric sparks flew thick and fast down the ice-fringed wires; and out from beneath the black arch of the big glass roof

would come creeping in the dead middle of the night, drowsy, unduly disturbed engines, with only a saloon and a guard's van to check their nocturnal, specially arranged race up the sleeping map. "Speed, speed, speed," had come the insistent voice out of the far-away smoky darkness, and Sir George Whitehair and Sir John Greybeard, beneath their rugs on the two sofas of the flying coach, grumbled a little ere they dozed, but agreed that abnormally wealthy lads must be humoured in their whims, even by aged baronets torn from their beds in the small cold hours of a winter's night.

It was an uphill, hopeless, foredoomed battle; and it was "all over a-Saturday week."

Those ten years for which he once sighed had come and gone, and in their train another ten. Smoothly, easily, slipping faster year by year, the second decade trod on the heels of the first and the shadow of the swiftly following years lay forward on the track of Time, keeping the sunlight from Time's footsteps.

He had been a great traveller and explorer and had been widely known as a hardy hunter of strange beasts, a climber of inaccessible peaks, a pioneer and wanderer in unknown countries on the wrong side of the equator where white men had never passed before. Then he had attained a certain reputation at home in the world of politics. With a safe seat for a northern constituency, he had been able to interest himself in independent domestic legislation without thought of party measures or party obligations. He was an authority on mining, dockyards, railway management, ship canals, and submarine tunnelling, while his thoughtful treatises on "Factory Control, an Inside View," and "Our Workshops from Behind the Scenes," had become text-books among all serious students of modern labour problems. He was a thoughtful, silent man, widely known and widely respected. Only in his proper place—the highest society of the land, in which by reason of his birth and fortune he should have shone—he was hardly known at all, because no one ever found him there.

He had married, twelve months ago, wisely and well, the lady upon whom the choice of his dead mother had long since fallen. Now he was a father.

As he sat before a pile of papers at the big library table in his London house, while the buzz of feminine voices turned to a shrill excited chorus in discussion of the little girl's names, the little girl's christening robes, the little girl's sponsors, and so forth, he was looking down at a shadowy portrait which lay in a small drawer on his right hand. It was an old, faded photograph. Indeed, it had begun to fade twenty years ago, when the light died out of the living face, and it had been fading ever since.

"Why not Alexandra to begin with?" They were the voices of mamma and mamma's nearest relatives. "And Victoria, out of respect for the old régime. Edith, she must be, of course, after *you*. And Sarah, after your aunt. But don't you think you ought to call her Augusta as well. I do honestly think the Duchess would be flattered and gratified."

"Richard," said his wife presently, laying a hand on his shoulder, and speaking with gentle reproach, "don't you take *any* interest? We have come to this room especially to consult you. Don't you mind what your daughter is called?"

"Yes, yes," he said, looking up. "I have thought of all that. She shall be called Heliotrope."

"Oh, I don't like that. It's the name of a flower."

"It is the name of a fairy."

"But what else besides—if we really fix on that?"

"Nothing else."

The voices rose higher and higher. "Oh, not to be dreamed of. Absurd, ridiculous. Your aunt would be furious. The Duchess will be huffed. Besides, that's the sort of name the people in Brixton give their girls—those fantastic names are quite out of fashion. It isn't a name at all. It would scandalize the Bishop, and honestly, I doubt if he would accept it."

But when they came to him and surrounded him in a moving circle of loud protest, he seemed hardly to hear them. He had taken up his pen and was making an extract from a blue book.

"Yes, yes," he said, looking up at last, looking through and over them, and speaking as though in answer to his own thought rather than to their agitated questions—"Heliotrope."

Her family were annoyed, her friends protested, the Bishop

seemed put out, if not scandalized. It was a very grand christening.

"Name this child," said the Bishop.

"Heliotrope," said the father, firmly.

"Again," said his lordship in a stern whisper, with puckered brows, as though incredulous and rather angry.

"Heliotrope," he repeated. But this time he spoke in a whisper. He was looking over and through the group of figures gathered round the font; the pupils of his eyes had contracted until they were only dark points no bigger than the head of a pin; and he seemed to be looking through the wall of the church.

Then, as the Bishop dipped his hand in the water and began to speak, there really was a cause for scandal. Members of her family raised their hands in horror, guests in the nearer pews tittered faintly, some uninvited attendants in the gallery broke into a strident laugh. In strong, ringing tones, drowning the voice of the Bishop, the father recited these monstrously unorthodox words:

In the sunlight, with no shadow,  
Please to guide her baby tread;  
While our fairy wings make music,  
Flying o'er her baby head.  
Smooth her path, and free from worry,  
Free from flurry, free from fuss,  
For we fairies are her guardians,  
And have made her one of *us*.

GEOFFREY MOSS

*Mein Schatz*

Geoffrey Moss was an officer of the Grenadier Guards, who since retiring from the army has written a number of popular novels and short stories. His best-known books are *Sweet Pepper*, *Whipped Cream*, *New Wine*, and *Little Green Apples*.





## MEIN SCHATZ

MEIN SCHATZ. That is what this sketch is called. They are all designs for the paper jackets of my novels. That one there you will remember. And that one too, perhaps. The one you are looking at is curious. It is unfinished, you see. There is a story behind.

I met her in Paris. I was living in Montparnasse that winter, doing a book. I used to work at it all day-- regular hours---nine till seven, or even eight. Then a quiet dinner and early to bed. Perhaps once a week I used to dance. Otherwise I kept to my routine.

I used to dine always at the same place, Le Dome. (It's spoilt now, big, rebuilt.) It was snug then; it had atmosphere. I used to eat my dinners with a newspaper or a book propped up in front of me. But often I was too tired to read. Then I used to watch the people. I got to know all the *clientèle*.

She was always with the same man, a middle-aged *bourgeois*: plump. I expect he was dark and going bald. She was small, like a robin, with brown hair, round cheeks, a little pointed chin and a mouth small and full, painted in three triangles, two little ones for the upper lip and a big one for the lower.

They did not arrive together, he and she. Obviously it was an arrangement that had to be kept secret; and obviously, too, they were tiring of each other. When he talked she used to drum with her finger tips on the table. Sometimes she would let her glance wander deliberately round the room till it met mine. For a moment our eyes would meet. We would make no sign. Then she would look away again. I had my work to do. I was not going to let anything disturb me.

The weeks slipped by. At dinner I was always conscious of the girl. Now, when our eyes met, the ghost of a smile

would twist the little scarlet triangles of her lips. The man noticed nothing. On the nights when he and she did not turn up, I missed them. I missed my understanding with her ; for I was lonely, working hard all day, seeing no one.

. . . . .

One night when I took my pen and paper instead of a book and worked between the courses, the girl was alone. That night I did not catch her eye. The next she was alone again. It was cold and she was wearing her cheap fur coat. Obviously, she was not expecting the man. I was mildly intrigued. All through dinner, though I knew she was conscious of my attention, she would not let me catch her eye. On my way towards the door I passed close to her table and, as I did so, she looked up.

I fingered the back of the empty chair. Was I permitted ? She made a grimace at me. I sat down.

She was playing with a jewelled spray of flowers, crystal beads strung on wire, an ordinary little ornament. They were common enough that winter in Paris.

One remembers best one's first meeting with a woman ; one's last ; perhaps one or two in between. In my remembrance of *Mein Schatz* the motif of our first meeting is that spray of jewelled flowers. Even now, if I shut my eyes, I can see in my fancy its glitter as she twisted it in her small, plump pretty hands. She talked, gabbled in little bursts of confidence, in bad easy French, with a Middle-European accent. And, as she talked, she twisted round and round that hat-shop trinket. It was new ; but she did not value it at all ; perhaps it had been the man's farewell ; resent. She kept bending the petals till a wire broke and a cascade of crystal beads trickled over the table. She made a little heap of them and set to destroying another petal.

She was Viennese, she told me. She was in Paris, painting. She was studying under Lott. We discussed his theories, his teaching. I held that it was a mistake to work at his *atelier* for long. His pupils were always recognizable. They had that broken-up lighting and lack of focus which became a tedious mannerism.

She had been serious long enough. She leant back. "What do you know about it ?"

"I used to paint . . . a little."

"I thought you were a writer. You're always scribbling."

"I do write. When I can't write, I paint."

She spun the jewelled flower. "I paint. When I can't paint, I love."

"That sounds very jolly."

The wire of another petal had been broken and more beads trickled on to the cloth. "I wonder if we are going to love each other."

My elbow was near hers. "What do you think?"

"I can't tell, yet."

"Do you hope?"

She looked up suddenly. Her eyes were gay, light reddish brown. She began to laugh. She had a round, merry laugh. Her skin was young. She could not have been more than three or four and twenty.

We talked on. She would never be serious for long. Presently the waiters grew restless. It was time to give another order or to go.

On the table, among the crumbs, was a pile of crystal beads, remnants of the spray of jewelled flowers. That, in my remembrance, is the first motif in the history of *Mein Schatz*.

. . . . .

I had determined to let nothing interfere with my work that spring. She did, of course. I had intended to be strong. I was weak.

"Won't you come and go round the galleries in the rue la Boétie this morning?"

"There's never anything worth seeing."

"Then come for a walk."

"I've got to write."

"The first days of a new love are so beautiful, so beautiful."

"I dare say."

"It's silly to waste the time indoors. The sun is shining."

"I've got my work to do."

"I know. But at first? When one's used to each other it's never so much fun. You'll have plenty of time then for your silly writing."

"You can't care much about your painting. That's clear."

"You don't care about me. That's all it is!"

We were in the minute room which served her as a studio,

and I had come round to fetch my manuscript which I had left the night before. There was room for a dinky dais, a stove, an easel, a stack of canvases, three upright chairs and ourselves. If someone else had entered, the place would have been crowded.

"You don't care about me."

I was not going to be intimidated. I kept my hands in the pockets of my trench-coat. "I never pretended I did."

"That's naughty. You ought to pretend a little. Otherwise it makes it so ugly."

I would not admit that I cared. "That's all right for you. That sort of thing is for women. They've nothing else to do. I've my book to write."

"Do you love writing so much?"

"Yes." I was standing, stern, rigid, upright. I saw myself as a figure of romance. I was determined to take my manuscript back to my room and to write.

"So much as all that?" Her hand was on my sleeve. It crept up to my shoulder. She was very small. Her cheek was against the hollow of my arm.

"Yes," I said, unyielding.

She sat down suddenly on the edge of the dais and put her chin in her hands. Her face was round and miserable like that of a very little girl. "I am so sad," she said. "I am so very sad."

"Just because you can't get what you want."

"Not at all."

"What then?" My hands came out of the pockets of my trench-coat. I was relenting.

"It's always the same by me. The man doesn't ever really care. You, you don't even take the trouble to pretend you do. I had thought that this time it was different. You're nicer than the others. If only you'd cared! Life's ugly if you love this boy; and then that; and then the other; but don't ever care really. The girls I grew up with are married respectably. And here I am."

"You could have married, I suppose." I wanted to get back to my writing. I was gruff.

"I thought I'd find a freer life. It is very possible that I did not care so much about art. It is very possible that I only wanted an artist's life—*la vie bohème*. One had read about it all, at home, in Gratz." (That was the first time

I had learnt that she only pretended to be Viennese.) "You, you've seen what I paint. It isn't any good." Her elbows were eloquent.

. . . . .

She was looking up at me, her finger moving over her round cheeks. "I want to be with you. I'm fed up with my work. To-day I want to trot round with you. I want to hang on your arm. I want to walk in the sun."

How can one combat that sort of thing? I moved to the other side of the room, five feet perhaps, to the rickety chair, brought in during the day from her bedroom on the other side of the dirty staircase. I was weakening. Of course she knew I was weakening. She jumped up and diving her hand inside my trench-coat, got my pen from my waistcoat pocket.

"You will take me out?" She knew she had won, but was pretending to let me down lightly.

I left my manuscript (which I used to carry always in a Dimanche-Auto) lying there on the chair with the broken caning. I waited while she slipped away to put on her hat. I let her catch my arm and lead me. I went. My pen, which she had taken, was left with my manuscript on the chair beside the stove.

That evening, after dinner, when I came to look for it, it was on the floor and (I have no idea how) broken. The ink had run out of it. I can still see the fragments of that pen, broken, lying on the uneven boards in the middle of a stain of dried ink.

That picture is another motif in the history of *Mein Schatz*.

. . . . .

She burnt her candle at both ends. That was her trouble. Paris was dance-mad that spring, and she was among the maddest. She wanted to dance all night. She wanted to be painting at Lott's *atelier* or in her own minute studio from ten till five. If she had slept after that it would have been something. But that was the time that I, who strove to keep to routine hours, was free; and she wanted to be with me. She can have slept very little. She would doze over a *camomile* outside a café. She would sleep in a taxi.

She did not eat enough, or what she ate was not good for her. She received some small allowance from an aunt in Gratz. It barely paid the rent of her bedroom and studio, and for her paints, which cost money even in Paris. She made what clothes she did not get as presents. She did her own washing in a pail. She lunched off dry bread and coffee, if she remembered to. She dined with me. She breakfasted, as a rule, at the end of a night of dissipation, off a Pernod sipped when half asleep in the corner of some dirty *boite*. Pernod is strong; it is of a cloudy greenish yellow; it warms; it makes it possible to forget what one does not want to remember; it smells of aniseed; it has its uses; but it does not make a good breakfast.

A girl of less vitality would have broken down, but she had that reserve of strength on which she could live and which ultimately she drained till there was nothing left.

. . . . .

Of course I could not have lived her life. A week of it would have finished me. Besides, I had my work to do, my hours to keep. I would be out two nights a week, not more. She had to be out every night. When I would not, she found other men. I was furiously jealous. I would threaten to break with her. She would dare me to. It must have been all rather ridiculous. At the time it seemed terribly important. Hating her and loving her I would go back to my bedroom, in the ramshackle building which called itself an *hôtel meublé*, early, so as to be fresh for work next morning. Thinking of her with other men's arms round her, I would sink at last into a distasteful sleep. In the morning, while I walked about, dressing and munching my *croissant*, I would try not to think of her. If I was to do a good day's writing, I must concentrate. Then, perhaps, when I had lost myself in what I was doing, I would be called back by the tapping of her finger tips on the panel of my locked door. I would pretend not to hear. I would try to get back into that other world where my characters lived and thought. Then, when I would not answer her, she would steal round into the dirty courtyard and peep in through the window (my room was on the ground floor). She would make faces at me and I would sit quite still; for, if one did not move, it was hard

to see one through the muslin curtain. Of course in the end I would have to give way. That was one side of our relationship. There was another.

. . . . .

On Sundays we used to go out of Paris, at first only to Versailles or other places as near. But, as the spring grew and days lengthened, we often went to Fontainebleau. Her story of being from Vienna was based only on a couple of years in an art school there, and in reality she was country-bred and at her most charming in the country. We used to take a picnic lunch and eat it in the forest. She was full of tales of her own country. Sitting over her coffee with her back against a tree trunk, she would tell me fairy stories, sometimes looking up into the branches, and with a cigarette drooping from her soft mouth, or sometimes bending forward towards me with the eagerness of a child. It was not so long since she had believed these stories, and, as she told them she was a child and they were true to her again. It was then that I loved her most. I would gather her to me, and with my eyes closed would hold her, while overhead the boughs of the great beech trees swayed soothingly in the wind.

It was then that she would talk to me only in her Austrian German. What German I knew I learnt from her. I learnt baby's German, love's German. She was *Mein Schatz*, my little Viennese kitten. It was all so apt, so right. With my arm about her I would hold her and repeat, as she said it, "*Mein Schatz. Mein Schatz.*"

There can never be any endearment so *gen.ütlig*. (There I have slipped back into her tongue. Perhaps I have used it wrongly.) Her head fitted so snugly into the hollow of my arm. She would purr so gently to me. Holding her was like sitting before a logfire in an unlighted room. She was so *gemütlig*. There in the forest she would whisper things that sounded softer than in any other tongue. I was stupid at picking it up. I was content to hold her and stroke her round little head and murmur, "*Mein Schatz, mein kleiner Schatz. Ich liebe dich.*"

. . . . .

She was kind. Once, when at very short notice I had to let a publisher know the length of the book I was finishing,



she sat up all night with me, counting words. The first sixty pages you count are not so bad; the next sixty send you dizzy; later comes a sort of second wind. We went on adding, checking, the table covered with a litter of type-script. Sometimes she would get up quietly and heat up some coffee on the *réchaud*. The room grew chilly. The light grew to look tired. Presently the dawn came, making the type-script as mournful as dead leaves and the bedroom nauseatingly drab.

But as a rule she was jealous of the work which kept me from her, just as I was jealous of the men with whom she danced.

Sometimes joking, sometimes serious, I used to say that the next book should be about her. We even sketched it out roughly on the paper table-cloths and the margins of *Le Jazx*. She would design a cover for me, she said. We talked often of that book. It was to be called *Mein Schatz*.

Far too often our evenings ended badly. I remember one of them. It was typical. We were lingering over dinner in some cheap restaurant. Sometimes I stole a glance at my watch.

"Your silly time!"

"If I'm not in bed by eleven, I can never start writing by nine. You know that."

"As for me, I'm not going to sit on here till you choose not to want me any more. There are plenty of others."

"I don't doubt it."

"Nice ones. François, Berthelot, Max."

"Bah!"

"They don't look at their watches when I'm with them. They look at me."

"I don't doubt it." I would be very calm. I folded my arms. I would smile at her as though I didn't care.

"I am going out with Otlig to-night, the one who asked me to go to Baden."

I would be firm. I laid down my cigarette. "I have barred him. You've not the right to go out with him."

"Not the right?"

"No."

"Who paid for this frock?" She caught the neck of her sweater and shook it. "I! And these shoes?" She beat with them on the floor. "I! And these stockings?" She

pulled her skirt up and glimpsed down to see which ones she was wearing. "I don't remember who gave me these. But not you. Anyhow, you haven't given me any since the New Year. And . . . and . . . and this hat? Yes, that's yours. Here! Take it! I don't want it. I'll go without a hat. If I was wearing a frock of yours, I'd tear it off and throw it in your face."

I said nothing, relying on that most English weapon, silence. And presently, wondering if she had gone too far, she looked up from the cigarette she had been destroying in her saucer and stole a glance at me.

"He is furious?"

I folded my arms again. It was like a game.

"Is he? Truly? No! That's too bad. I didn't mean all that. Perhaps it was not Otlig who asked me to go with him to Baden."

"If you are with me, you haven't the right to go about with the sort of men who ask you to go with them to Baden."

"But they all do."

"I don't doubt it."

It was openly a game now. And it was time to go. I walked her home. At least I walked; she, her fingers on my arm, trotted at my side.

At the gates of the yard off which she lived we stopped. It was the yard of a small factory where they remade old felt hats. At night it was deserted. The street was a desolate one, off a shabby boulevard beyond the Avenue Suffren and the Eiffel Tower, in XIIIe *arrondissement*. She looked so small. She was so young. Youth lasted but a minute. I was suddenly tender.

I took her in my arms. "Don't go out to-night."

She hid her face in the folds of my trench-coat and shook her head. It was I who would do the talking now.

"I wish you wouldn't."

She rang the bell. At length we heard the scrape of wire which allowed the door in the gate to be opened. We went in and made our way silently up to her room.

"Don't go." I found the gramophone record I had bought for her that afternoon and which had not yet been unpacked. "Listen. We'll go out together. We'll take

this with us. We'll go to the Café where the parrots are; and we can play it on the gramophone. We can dance for a bit. Then I'll bring you back here."

"No."

"This is the tune you are mad about. They won't know it where you go."

"No." She was changing her stockings, pulling them up, fastening them. I could not let her go.

"Here. I'll promise you anything. I'll take you out to-night."

The stockings were on. She was before the uneven looking-glass which hung from a nail. I leant back against the wall. I took my hands out of my trench-coat pockets and made a gesture. "I can't trust you."

She was twisting her tie of catskin round her neck.

"I can't trust, can I?"

"No."

I moved a yard to the left. I could not have moved much more in either direction; the room was so small. I stood with my back against the door.

"You tell me that!"

She was gathering oddments and shoving them into her bag. "I've betrayed all my lovers. Always!"

"Yes, but this is different."

She was ready now. She reached across me and grasped the handle of the door. I was jealous, but no longer angry. I decided to be generous and to force her to be generous in return.

"All right. Go along with you. Enjoy yourself." I took the new gramophone record I had bought and pushed it into her hands. "Take it with you. The orchestra can put it on a gramophone. They pick up things so quickly. They'll learn it in no time and you'll be able to dance to it, after all."

She looked up at me. Her eyes were kind again. "I shan't enjoy it much, anyhow. Because it won't be with you."

"*Mein Schatz*."

She lifted her face. I put my arm around her. The record slipped from her hands, fell to the floor and snapped.

In my remembrance the picture of that gramophone record, lying on the bare boards, new, glittering, but broken, is the motif of our spring together.

I held her for an instant.

"*Mein Schatz*," I breathed. "*Mein lieber Schatz*."

. . . . .

We took our holiday together that summer. The oaks, the chestnuts and the beeches of Fontainebleau were not enough. She had a hunger for the pines of her home. I took her to the Landes, to the little village not far from Mont de Marson. There were miles and miles of pines, each with scars up its trunk and its little pot to catch the resin. There was a river, the Medouze, as lazy as its name, bordered by the turf banks of some ancient and abandoned canalization, by willows and a strip of park-like land. I used to fish. *Mein Schatz*, lying on the bank with her head in her hands, would watch me. It was hot. In the afternoon we used to lie inert in the shade.

We were happy. There was nothing to ruffle the quiet of those still woods. Sometimes she painted, lazily, with a few tubes and a big brush. Sometimes we talked over the book I would write about her.

"You'll never write it," she said.

"I shall."

"No."

"If I do, you'll never do the jacket for it; though that's only an hour's work."

"I will do it. You'll see."

"Not you. *Mein Schatz* is too lazy."

"Yes. I tell you. Yes. Yes."

"No. I tell you. No."

The inn was clean. There were figs and grapes in abundance. We swore we would gladly have stayed there together for ever. I could have been happy till October. By mid-August she missed the gaiety she loved. Suddenly one day she wanted to leave.

"We can go to Biarritz," she said. "One can dance there. This place is awful. It's as dull as home. It was because it was like this there that I went away to Wien."

I temporized, thinking that this was but a mood. But next morning she had started to pack even before they had brought us our coffee.

"I can't endure this any more," she said, thrusting a

handful of clothes into a corner of her suitcase. "I hate the pines. I hate these country places. I hate the silence. I hate it all. I want music, jazz." She jumped up and caught my arm. "We're going, aren't we? Don't look fierce. Say 'Yes.' Now say that 'Yes?'" she pleaded. "Yes?"

We went.

. . . . .

Biarritz was expensive. The standard, if you wished to dance, was a high one. I was spending more than I should have. I was writing nothing, getting no ideas. I felt it was all a waste of time and money. I sulked.

"I'm not going out to-night," I used to say, when we had finished dinner in the sort of restaurant we could afford.

*"Bitte. . . . Bitte."*

"No." I would be firm. I would fold my arms and frown.

She would drum on the table with her finger tips and hum a tune. "Just for a little?"

"No."

. . . . .

We saw the end coming, and we were afraid. One night, especially, I remember. We wandered along the coast and sat down upon the rocks.

"But you do love me still?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Truly true?"

"Truly true."

"You're not tired of me a bit?"

I put my arm round her. She was silent for a little.

"It doesn't ever last. It's that which is sad. I don't want to keep you when once you want to go. It is staying after one does not care any more which makes loving ugly, so ugly. Give me a promise you will tell me when you are tired."

I bent to put my cheek against hers. We talked of other things.

"I wish I could find some leaves," she said presently. "There is a thing they do, at home in the country, to find out about their love. Do you think you could find me some leaves? Do you think you could?"

I clambered up the rocks, but the only thing which grew on the cliffs was tamarisk, and after a little I came back. "There aren't any leaves."

"I did want them."

"Would leaves of a book do?" I tore some from my notebook.

"One must bend up the edges and make them into little ships," she explained.

I showed her how to make paper boats. She spoilt several. In the end she had two ready.

"Now we float them side by side on the water. You take yours, I take mine. No, they must not touch. Just so far apart. Now let them go. Then one can tell which will leave the other."

We stood up and watched. Her fingers found mine. The little paper boats floated idly. There was a half-moon. The night was very still. Our boats trembled in a flicker of air from nowhere. Hers listed over a little. The shoulder of a slow swell took mine. It began to drift away.

"Oh," she said, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"It's all nonsense," I told her.

"No. No."

I kissed her. I shook my head. She shook hers.

"No, it's true. I know it's true."

I held her tightly, as though nothing should ever take her from me. Her little painted mouth was soft.

Long after, when we looked again, my boat had drifted out of sight.

In my memory of *Mein Schatz* the picture of those little boats made of sheets from my notebook, floating side by side and then drifting apart, is the motif of those days.

. . . . .

I hit on a plot for a story. I wanted to be left to myself. I was busy and content.

She picked up with a man on the *plage* and when I heard of it I was furious.

"You don't love me," she said.

"Not when you go on like that."

"I knew you would tire of me. I said so always."

"I'm not tired of you. Only I've my work to do."

"You're always angry with me."

"Because you won't behave reasonably."

That evening during dinner I scarcely spoke. I was working out my story. After I had had my coffee I went for a stroll alone and then went to bed.

Next morning while I was taking my breakfast at the open window she came across the room to me and leant against the window frame. She took a deep breath.

"Listen," she said. "Last night I betrayed you. I betrayed you with a dago I danced with. I thought I must let you know."

"What do you mean?" I jumped up.

"That which I tell you." She ran out of the room.

I dressed and went for a walk. I was mad with rage. I would clear out and leave her. I didn't care if she starved! I had brought her from Paris. I must see that she could get back there. I bought a ticket, left it and a few hundred francs in an envelope for her, packed my things, paid the bill and left.

. . . . .

For six years I never heard of her. Then she sent me a letter from Switzerland. She had been burning the candle at both ends for too long, she admitted. She had consumption. She was there for a cure. It was doing her good. She was better than she had been. She hoped she would get quite well. She hoped I had begun the story about her. She hoped, as soon as she was well again, to do the cover for it.

I answered. I had not begun the story. I wished her luck.

. . . . .

It was not quite two years later that she wrote again, this time from Stuttgart.

"My dear,—I inhabit room 213 of this clinic. It is small, as small as my room in Paris was, but it is clean, dreadfully clean. There is no dust, no pictures, not even any colour.

"I am going to die. They say I should last another four or five days. And I want to make the cover for the book

you are going to write about me. It will be my only memorial. They do not want me to do it, but I say that, if I am to die anyhow, it can make no difference.

“My love to you,  
“Thine *Schatz*.”

I telegraphed. I wrote. I would have liked to see her again, but I could not go. In another ten days came a package, neatly done up, stamped with the stamp of the hospital. In it was a typed letter from some official. She had not finished the cover before she died, but she had asked that it should be sent to me. There were some details about her burial and in an open envelope a note from her.

“My dear,---I go. But before all that happens I want to tell you one thing. I did not betray you that time at Biarritz. You are the only man I did not ever betray. But I saw that you were tired of me and I wished that it should be I who should make the break.

“Believe me. For there would be no reason to write this if it were not true.

“Think sometimes of me,  
“Thine *Schatz*.”

That letter is the last motif of the story. It is over there, in a drawer, somewhere. Up there on the wall is her sketch: the sketch she never finished—for the book I never wrote.

*Mein Schatz!*





ETHEL MANNIN

*Michele Gloria*

Ethel Mannin is one of the most provocative of the younger school of writers, with a long list of novels, stories, and travel books to her credit. Her principal publications have been *Sounding Brass*, *Confessions and Impressions*, *Ragged Banners*, and *Forever Wandering*.



## MICHELE GLORIA

You may say that with a name like Michele Gloria he should have been a poet. Perhaps he was. There is no reason why a waiter should not also be a poet.

He was eighteen when he first set eyes on Maria. For a long time he never knew her other name. She was simply Maria—with the soft Italian pronunciation of the name. Maria of the golden hair.

She was chambermaid at the same hotel—the only *albergo* of any importance in the place, which was Tivoli, incredible, enchanted Tivoli. But for Michele there was no magic in Tivoli until Maria came. He had been born there, and when he stood on the chasm-edge above the waterfalls and the olive-terraces, he saw nothing but the dome of St. Peter's, far away across the vast plain of the Campagna, like the sail of a ship dim upon the horizon of an empty sea.

Even in his childhood it had fired his imagination, and all his life he remembered the day he followed the winding road down from hill-top Tivoli, and trudged the weary miles across the Campagna and came at last to the dazzling reality of that dome. The white dust of the Appian Way in his nostrils was gold dust in his soul from that day onwards. If only one might live always in the shadow of the glistening dome!

At first it was his mother who stood between him and the realization of his dream. She had been born and lived all her life in Tivoli; not for her, either in dreams or reality, the trek to the great city. So Michele stayed with her in Tivoli because she was a widow and there was no one but him to care for her. And then with the coming of Maria the dream was laid aside, for Maria became his world.

Maria came from Frascati, and she was as sweet and golden as its wine. But the gold and sweet of her was not for Michele. It was as though from the first she belonged to

Ferrari—Ferrari who was set in authority over Michele, and who was as arrogant as Michele was gentle, and as dark as Maria was fair.

When Maria came first to the hotel Michele lived for the one evening each week when, Ferrari taking his weekly half-holiday, she was required to help in the dining-room. Then he would have occasion to speak to her, and she to him; for her then he could perform little services, such as taking over the bigger tables and leaving her the smaller ones, uncorking the bottles of wine for her, and rushing through his own work until the sweat poured down his face, so that he might have time to help her with hers—she who was slow and shy and confused in the noisy dining-room.

She never thanked him for these services, not because she was of an ungrateful nature, but because she did not notice them. Michele knew this, but it did not matter; he knew that he was helping her even though she did not realize it, and to do the smallest thing for her was exquisite joy.

But after a few weeks Ferrari applied to the *gouvernante* for permission to change his half-holiday so that it synchronized with Maria's. The *gouvernante* shrugged and expressed the opinion that for all the use Maria was in the dining-room he might as well—provided Michele did not mind; it was his loss if it was anyone's, since it meant that for one evening a week he would be single-handed, and more guests were expected. Ferrari replied that he had already discussed the idea with Michele, who had raised no objection. Which was not true.

But Michele did not resent being asked; he knew that Maria hated that one evening a week which was such a joy for him; he knew that it was because of her that Ferrari had changed his half-day, and he knew by the way in which Maria's eyes lit up whenever Ferrari came by that the new arrangement would mean happiness for her.

When Michele rushed about the dining-room single-handed that one evening a week it was not of Ferrari's selfishness he thought, but of Maria's happiness; it was another way of doing something for her. And if sometimes on those nights when at last he was free to come into his tiny room and fling himself down on his narrow bed, almost too tired

to undress, there came to him a tormenting vision of Maria and her lover sitting together hand in hand in the warm darkness of a cinema in the great city far away across the Campagna, he would fight down the thought by reminding himself that she was happy that night, and that it was he who by his submissiveness made that happiness possible.

He had only to complain to the *governante* that the dining-room work was too much for him single-handed for Ferrari and Maria to be forced to take their time off on different days; it afforded him a curiously satisfying sense of power, this thought that their happiness lay thus in his hands. And to work a little harder one evening a week that she might be happy—it seemed to him so little a thing to do for her.

He did not resent the fact that she was scarcely aware of him, scarcely saw him, although with her physical vision she saw him every day. Why should she notice him? What does the sun know of the random weed in the grass? It is for the weed to be grateful that the sun which melts the snows of the mountain-tops should allow even a little of its warmth to seek it out, hidden there among the humbler things of earth. Ferrari, with his coarse hands, his bold tongue, his insolent eyes, was not good enough for her—but who short of a holy saint *would* be good enough?

And Michele was not blind to the fact that Ferrari's laughing arrogance had an attractiveness for women; Maria was not the first woman to come under its fascination. Whilst he, Michele Gloria, what was there glorious at all about him except his name—and Maria probably did not even know his full name. It did not matter. She represented something out of reach; beyond the grasp of both the Micheles and the Ferraris of life. Ferrari might touch her hands and press her lips, but, Michele thought, the soul of her would escape him in the very midst of a kiss. Sometimes in dreams Michele would see it rising up out of their embrace, a small, pale, slender thing, a wistful Madonna in a blue gown with a golden halo—

Only sometimes, too, Michele thought of the white flower of her face, and the red flower of her mouth. Sometimes. Because man does not live by dreams alone, or, living by dreams, lives indeed alone.

And then, in the midst of this confusion of torment and ecstasy that was now Michele Gloria's secret life, the

disastrous thing happened. Ferrari was one day a little too arrogant—and the proprietor dispensed with his services.

For a week Maria went about like a lamp whose flame is extinguished. Michele ached to reach out to her in sympathy, but if she had scarcely seen him before, now in her misery she was quite blind to him, pale and lifeless and unapproachable; and at the end of the week she disappeared. No one knew where. There were those who gossiped and conjectured that wherever Ferrari had gone, there would Maria also be found. And none knew where Ferrari had gone, though Tivoli knew him no more—and did not the whole world lie beyond the Campagna?

Then there was a great hole in Michele's life. It was Spring—the tempestuous Spring of Tivoli, the almond blossom flung like a youthful challenge against the old, wise sombreness of the olives, rose against grey upon every terrace, and eager winds that swept the Campagna and called the flowers up out of the earth with the same breath that set the snows melting on the Sabine mountains. Michele went on laying tables, handing dishes, answering bells, cleaning silver, running to and fro, all day, every day, and dropping down at nights on his hard, narrow bed to press his face into the pillow to shut out the vision of a white face and eyes like lamps extinguished. There was a dull heaviness dragging at his heart like a physical pain in all that he did, and the glow of the almond blossom faded without his ever having seen it. He was the senior waiter now, in Ferrari's place; he had a little more money, a little more freedom; but he gave his mother the extra money, and the little more leisure meant only more time for brooding.

At the close of that numb Spring his mother died, and utter loneliness descended upon him, and with it the return of that dream that had been laid aside with the coming of Maria. Once more he gazed out across the Campagna and saw the dome of St. Peter's like the sail of a ship upon the rim of the world, and the old nostalgia seized him. It was deeper and blacker than ever now, that hole in his life. There was nothing left now in Tivoli but memories that throbbed like the scars of old wounds. He was free now—free to go down the hillside, along the white dusty road that his boyish feet had trod with that surging sense of adventure and expectant pilgrimage, down through the olive groves and out

across that great, grey tragic plain to the city of his old desire ; free to go, his first dream being his last, left over from the wreck of the days, the one thing static in the shifting chaos of things.

Free to go—with no joy left in the going.

But there was nothing left to do, and he went, upon a day when the sky was stretched taut, a blue silk canopy above the shadeless plain where the wind-flowers blew among the ruins of pagan temples and imperial palaces, and upon whose shimmering horizon floated the mirage of the city that mortal man has named eternal.

In no mood does Rome ever betray those who love her. Rome was for Michele Gloria all that he had dreamed of her. She gave to him, as to all her lovers, moments of purest ecstasy out of the everlasting store of her brooding beauty. It was at sundown, when all the light of the world seemed drained up into the sky, and the cypresses that sentinel the city were dark spears laid against a burnished shield, that he thought most of Maria. Sometimes then he could find leisure to slip away to the garden terraces of the Pincio, and from the little fountain under its dark tapestry of trees look out across the city held below in the embrace of its low hills, and see "the savage Roman sunset" like a celestial fire behind the golden dome, and always, as he gazed and gazed, drinking deep of that miracle of beauty, there would creep upon him, as shadows creep up out of the earth, the memory of Maria and the mute sorrow of her eyes. He would retrace his steps along the terrace towards the Via Sistina and come into the little *piazza* in front of the Trinita de' Monte and sit on the low parapet at the top of the old yellow steps sweeping up in a great golden wave from the vividly coloured reef formed by the flower stalls under their striped sun umbrellas on the pavement below. And the facade of the twin-towered church, as old and yellow and stately as the steps, would be turned with them and the *piazza* to sheerest gold, caught up in the world's great symphony of light. The beauty of it would be unbearable, because of the ache at his heart, and he would creep into the church and kneel in a pew at the back, listening to the Ave Marias of the nuns. Very close to him then would draw the little lonely soul of Maria in its thin blue gown and crowned with light. Her spirit would



companion him then, almost he could see it, borne upwards on a trail of incense, like the holy song of the suns, beauty coming in a dim cloud, like a sacred veil, between him and "the grunt and sweat of a weary world."

On his weekly half-day of freedom his feet turned instinctively to the old stones of the Palatine, climbing up through the sweet warm grasses to the summit, and he could look out without bitterness across the Campagna towards Tivoli—even when once more the almond blossom foamed in rosy waves against the olives' grey. Its name was music in his heart now as it had never been before. Tivoli of the lovely, aching memories; Tivoli, to which he could never return, because it was haunted.

If only he had something of hers, he would think, one single golden hair, one scrap of paper upon which she had written her name, one withered flower that had ever died upon her breast; but he had nothing, nothing.

It was this hunger for something of hers, something tangible, which caused him to paste upon the wall at the foot of his bed the picture of an Englishwoman torn from an English magazine. Michele did not understand English, and did not usually look at the magazines that were his for the taking when they were removed from the hotel lounge to make room for later issues; but there was a wet half-holiday, and he took some of the magazines along to his room and lay face downward on his bed and looked at the pictures and pondered upon what seemed to him the extraordinary difficulty of the English tongue, and the extraordinary ease with which some people, like the concierge, mastered it, and it was thus he came upon the picture of Isabel Hayes.

He did not remember the name, he only saw the face; it was so like Maria's that but for the sheer improbability of the thing he might have believed it was a picture of her—the same smooth bands of hair catching the light, the same wide, grave eyes, the same wistful mouth. He gazed long and long at it, until at last he could not see it clearly because of the mist that came before his eyes.

That picture, cut out of the magazine and pasted on the wall opposite his bed, was the last thing he saw at night and the first thing he saw on waking.

In time he forgot that it was a picture of an English-

woman and torn from an English magazine; almost he deceived himself that it was indeed a picture of Maria, and because of it something of her came to inhabit his room. Her eyes smiled gravely at him; her tender mouth trembled always on the brink of gentle, comforting words. The heaviness ceased to drag at his heart; he was happier, almost as happy as he had been at Tivoli in the days when he knew on waking each morning that at some time during the day he must at least glimpse Maria, if only for a moment at the other end of the corridor, or at the far side of a crowded room.

And then, a few months after his discovery of the picture, there came the incredible day when he walked into the dining-room of the hotel to find "Maria" seated there, facing him, watching him. The Maria of the picture there in the flesh, wearing even the same dark dress with the wide white collar. Even in that moment of shock and amazement something in him knew that this was not the Maria who had lighted his days in Tivoli like a golden torch, but it was the Maria of the picture with whom he had grown to identify her, the Maria who was more real to him now.

It was incredible; it was fantastic; but it was true. He was glad that her table was not on his "station"; there was an uncontrollable trembling in his limbs. He ached to look at her, to gaze and gaze, to devour her with his eyes, and yet he dared not look at her; only out of the corners of his averted eyes as he darted about the room he caught the gold gleam of her hair, and was aware of her there, incredibly, in his life, she, the incarnation of his memory that was become a dream.

After the dinner was served he went to the concierge, taking with him the picture from the wall in his room.

"This lady that arrived to-night—who is she? This picture I tore out of an English magazine months ago——"

His hands trembled as he held out the picture. The concierge took it and gazed at it, and Michele's excitement imparted itself to him. It was indeed she, the newly arrived *signora* who described herself on the identification card she had filled in on her arrival as a novelist. People who wrote books frequently had their pictures in magazines, did they not? And she would not be the first English writer to stay at this *albergo-pensione* in the Via Sistina. There was no

strangeness in her being there, only in Michele's happening upon her picture. That was exciting. They took the picture to the *governante*, and the *governante*, flattered that an English writer who had her picture in a paper should have come there, took the cutting to the *signora* herself, with Michele and the concierge in the background.

The *Signora* Hayes was amused. She appreciated fully the incredulous surprise of the waiter who had cut her picture out of a paper months ago upon seeing her materialize in the flesh. The journalist friend who had recommended her to this particular hotel would be enormously "intrigued." She debated with herself as to the suitability of giving this waiter, who had paid her the compliment of cutting her picture out of the magazine and keeping it all these months, a signed original of the photograph. It was the sort of thing that if one read in a story one would not credit as likely—life demonstrating the fact that truth is stranger than fiction.

One might, indeed, make a story out of it, about the Italian waiter who cut the picture of an Englishwoman out of a magazine and kept it because she reminded him—so the *governante*, who spoke English, explained—of someone he knew. Someone he knew? Someone he loved, that would mean. It was more than romantic, it was a little pathetic, pitiful. It was because of that that the *Signora* Hayes made a special point of being nice to the little waiter they called Michele. She regretted that he was not her table waiter; she would have liked to have given him a tip, a bigger tip than was indicated, just to show her appreciation of the compliment he had paid her.

Michele also regretted that he had not to wait on her; now that he had recovered from the shock of seeing her there he wanted to serve her, because all that he would do for her would be doing for Maria. But there were still things he could do; he cleaned her shoes, on the pretext of helping the porter who was also the "boots"; he prepared her tray for the *collazione* on the pretext of helping the other waiter; he saw to it that the best flowers were on her table in the dining-room; he bought violets and gave them to the chambermaid to put in her room, saying that the *signora* had mentioned to him that she wished flowers put in her room.

He knew that she was not Maria, yet so closely was she

identified with her that he never once thought of her as the *Signora* Hayes. When he looked at her he did not see the English lady in the smart English clothes; he saw little Maria in her black chambermaid's dress with the white apron and the stiff frilled cap that was an outrage to the glory of her golden braids. When she smiled at him it was the shy smile of Maria moving confusedly about the hot, noisy dining-room of the *albergo* in Tivoli who smiled, so closely were they merged in his thoughts, the Maria of Tivoli and the Maria of the picture.

Isabel Hayes spent a great deal of her time in her room writing; she had specially asked for a quiet room for that purpose, and had, accordingly, been given a room at the end of a corridor, with an empty room adjoining. This room was used as a store-room for boxes and trunks, but when more guests were expected, all rooms being occupied, the *governante* decided that the store-room must be sacrificed and revert to its original use as a bedroom. The chambermaid, Rosa, and Michele were instructed to clear the room and prepare it for a guest, and they were cautioned to be very quiet, because the English lady was in her room and working.

Rosa and Michele worked as quietly as people moving heavy boxes can work, but Rosa stumbled against a cabinet-trunk that had a heavy wooden box balanced precariously on the top, with the result that the box crashed noisily to the floor, and the *governante* came along the corridor in a fury of indignation to demand the meaning of the racket. A great torrent of words gushed forth from her. Michele attempted to explain that the accident was unavoidable and the noise unintentional, and his explanation was fuel added to the fire of her wrath. She accused him of impertinence and insubordination, and Michele began to grow angry. He had silently endured the *governante's* incessant nagging for months, and all his suppressed, accumulated resentments broke their bonds and leapt forth, gathering force from a sense of injustice and a growing resentment at Rosa's silence and a total lack of any attempt to shift any of the blame on to herself—she who was the culprit.

For fully five minutes Michele and the *governante* battered each other in unison with their tongues, Italian fashion; and in the interval in which for a few seconds Michele's eloquence failed him, the *governante* thrust home the mortal

blow, and Michele never recovered his tongue. He was to go; lock, stock, and barrel he was to be clear of that house within an hour. The *governante* swept away in triumph. Rosa burst into tears.

"Now," she sobbed, "I shall have no one to help me."

Michele gazed at her, stricken, dazed with the sense of calamity. Rosa had no one to help her with a few boxes, but he had nowhere to go.

"It's her fault," sobbed Rosa, wheeling round suddenly and shaking her fist towards the adjoining room. "But for her and her writing it wouldn't have mattered how much noise we made."

Her words wakened Michele from his trance.

"Don't be foolish, Rosa. It's not her fault; it was your clumsiness."

Then it was Rosa's turn. She placed her hands on her hips and began to pour out a stream of abuse, which Michele did not wait to hear. He turned and strode out of the room, and in the corridor met Isabel Hayes. She addressed him in her halting Italian. She said:

"I heard. I have told the *governante* that you did not disturb me—not at all. But she says you must go. I am so sorry."

She held out her hand to him, pressed something into his hand—paper. She went on talking:

"I do hope you find some other place. I am so very sorry."

He stared at her stupidly, conscious of the paper she had pressed into his hand, heard himself murmuring out of the agonized dumbness of his soul:

"*Grazia, signora, grazia.*"

After she had retired within her room and closed the door, he stood there staring at the place where she had stood. Presently his hand, it seemed to him, crept round of its own volition, stretched itself out before him, the fingers unclosed, and upon his palm he saw a crumpled fifty-lira note. He stood there gazing at it stupidly.

He came out into the Via Sistina. One side of the street was golden and the other purple with shadow. There was a constant clatter of horses' hoofs on the cobbles and the shrillness of motor-horns; in the Piazza Barberini the clang

of trams, Bernini's dolphin spurting the water high up into the air, the glow of the flowers massed on a stall at the corner, the busy-ness of life going on.

He walked briskly, clutching his bulky valise, across the *piazza*, up the hill in the narrow street of the four fountains, the old cedar in the garden of the Barberini palace waving its arms out over the street like banners hung out for a *fiesta*. Presently the surging tumult of the Via Nazionale, children playing under the trees in the Piazza di Termini; another and larger fountain leaping in the sunlight; the ruins of the Diocletian baths golden with afternoon, the gleam of white cloths at the café tables in the arcades.

He deposited his valise at the railway station and came out again, walking aimlessly, trying to think. He must find a lodging for the night, and to-morrow he must read the newspaper, go the round of the hotels and *pensiones*. Or should he, perhaps, return to Tivoli and live there with his memories? Or remain in Rome until she left—she whom he had adored, and who had thrust a fifty-lira note into his hand because she was sorry for him—who had lost his job because of her?

No, no; he could not stay in Rome. She was to be there a long time, and he might encounter her. She would stop him and ask kindly after his welfare; give him money again, perhaps, condescend to him. Not as Maria might condescend, like a saint leaning out from Paradise and reaching earthwards in divine compassion—no, not that way, but as an English lady condescending to an unfortunate Italian waiter.

Maria, Maria, because of you that adoration of that other one; because of you this agony of humiliation; because of you this homeless wandering of the unheeding streets!

Blindly back down the garish, noisy crowded Via Nazionale; people sauntering, people hurrying, blocking his path, jostling him. Mother of God, was there no peace anywhere, no place in which one might sit down and think, struggle on to some path out of the chaos?

He crossed a street, and the open door of a café on the corner was like arms held out to him. He went in and sat down, and gazed about him helplessly, like a hunted thing making sure that its pursuers are not following. Here, at least, one escaped a little of the noise of the traffic; here

people did not jostle one. But it was the wrong sort of café ; it catered for the English and American tourists, five o'clock teas, English voices about him, English faces, English ladies looking at him. He would go.

But now it was too late. His retreat was cut off by a waitress. He looked about desperately, still seeking a way of escape from this paradox of a café where waitresses stood ready to serve one with afternoon tea. One could make some excuse. He half-rose, and then it was that he saw Maria—Maria with a frilled white cap that was an outrage to the gold braids of her hair, Maria with a tight black dress clasping her slim body, Maria with the great grave eyes set somehow sorrowfully in the pallor of her face.

The waitress by his table spoke to him, but he did not hear. He was on his feet, darting between the tables, and her name was upon his lips in a great shout that vibrated in every nerve of his body.

"Maria ! Maria !"

People turned their heads to stare at him, but he did not see them. He looked up, and her eyes were suddenly like lamps lit in a dark room.

"Michele !" She came towards him ; there was the touch of her fingers on his wrists, and a faintness came over him. He sank down helplessly at the nearest table ; she stood over him, so like any waitress serving an ordinary customer that people who had begun to be interested went on with their teas.

He sat there, his elbows on the table, his hands clasped, tears streaming down his face, gazing up at her.

"You are real, Maria ! I'm not just dreaming ?"

She laughed, a little quavering laugh that had nothing of mirth in it.

"I am real enough, Michele, but I've wished and wished that it were all a dream, all the months that I've been in Rome."

"You've been months in Rome ? Why didn't I know !"

"How could you ! You're working here, too ? This is your half-day "

"I was working—until an hour ago." He told her, briefly. "And you ? You went to Ferrari ?" It had to be asked, that question.

"Yes, I went to Ferrari, in Naples ; we were married there.

He was very cruel to me. He was killed in a street brawl two months after, and I was glad, glad." He saw the colour creep up momentarily in her cheeks and flames leap up in her eyes. "You will think that I am wicked to say that, Michele, I who was his wife, but he was cruel to me. It is true what we say of the Neapolitans—they are barbarians!"

She was trembling, the little thing; her hands fluttered distressfully, like the wings of a trapped bird. And then Michele—Michele who had always worshipped from afar—did a strange, bold thing. He seized her wrists and held them firmly, and he said:

Someone should look after you, Maria, to see that you do not hurt yourself again; and I should be the one, I should be the best one, because I love you, because I have always loved you. To-day you will tell them here that you will work no longer for them after to-day, and to-morrow morning we will meet by the fountain on the Pincio—at twelve o'clock; that will give me time to find out where and how soon we may be married and what we should best do. But all that you will leave to me.

He rose. "*Arrivederci*."

She answered, "*Arrivederci—presto!*" and pressed his hand. "In the past I have been very foolish—and very, very blind."

Michele Gloria passed that night in Tivoli under the roof of his old home, the little rough stone house among the olive-trees that his father had built and to which his mother had come as a bride and her only child been born. Shuttered was the old house, and loneliness lay heavier than the dust upon it, but when Michele went out of it in the morning he left the shutters and windows open for the sunlight to pour in for the coming of its new mistress.

At the *albergo* the *governante* rejoiced to see him. Michele said he was tired of working in a city, and had come to ask if she would take him back.

"And Maria? You remember Maria? She, too, has worked in Rome; she has experience now; can you find a place for her, for a little while until we can be married?" Yes, he admitted, Maria had been slow, and perhaps not so very useful, but she had more experience now—and it was but for a little while; by the time the season was over, and the English and Americans had stopped crowding out from



Rome, they would be married. She would be useful, he urged, for the little while during the season—but if there were no place for Maria, then, said Michele slyly, he thought that perhaps after all he would have to go on working in Rome. The *governante* thought that that would be a pity; good waiters were so hard to get here in Tivoli; the best ones went to Rome—and they did not come back, particularly in the season when they were most needed.

So Michele had his way.

Once again he descended the long, white, dusty road between the olives, his eyes turned towards the far, faint dome miles away across the Campagna. It was not yet noon when he came into the city, and he was glad, for he had a call to make before he kept his tryst with Maria. He stepped in at the hotel in the Via Sistina and handed to the concierge a sealed envelope addressed to the *Signora* Hayes. It contained the fifty-lira note folded in the magazine cutting of her picture—there was no accompanying note.

On the Pincio the fountain was leaping in its circular basin under the dark, cool canopy of the ivy-trees. He sat upon the low parapet of the terrace and waited, and promptly with the cannon-boom of midday reverberating over the city she came up the steps and into the sun-drenched *piazza*, looking about her eagerly. When she saw him she smiled and quickened her pace. He stood up; waiting, savouring to the full the heaven of this spectacle of her coming to him—at last.

URSULA BLOOM

*The Trees Made Answer*

Ursula Bloom's first book was published privately when she was seven years old, but she did not settle down to a literary career until 1918, when she started as a free-lance journalist. Since then she has written over twenty novels and books of stories.



## THE TREES MADE ANSWER

LEILA had always thought of life as a pattern of growing, but somehow lately the pattern had become grim. It had become nothing but the ordinariness of routine. It was absorbed in everydayness. The tragic part was that she was still young, for she would not be thirty until the autumn. Life had still a springtime to offer her, and she was afraid to see it slipping from beneath her grasp.

She had been married nine years, a romantic marriage, a marriage for love, and yet now she was not sure that it had not been a mistake. Then Monty had adored her; he had been tremendously in love with her, and was also a barrister; now he was all barrister.

He seemed to have forgotten Leila and her two children, and she had worried herself sick over it. She had fretted the strange inward and unseen way in which women of really deep feelings do fret. Monty who had loved her once so much that she came first in everything; Monty who now was so in love with his career that she came but a poor second. The wound hurt.

There were the children, of course.

Pearl had been born in the first year of their marriage, when a dawn rose cream and pink; Alec had come a couple of years later. Then they had been still in love, she and Monty, it had been an emotion which she could hold, and cherish, and foster, as one fosters some delicate flower, but now rut, routine and everydayness had stolen it from her. She loved him still, of course, but remotely, with an emotion that was no longer tangible. She loved the children too, but they were reaching prep-school age, and did not need her in the same way that once they had done.

She did not want to settle down into the mere waiting for the years of her life to pass. She wanted love again. The sort of love that she and Monty had once held and had

absorbed, and had allowed to flitter away into the nothingness of everydayness.

She had come down here to the garden to make a definite decision about it all. Should she accept a lover or not? She had the chance now and she was not sure that she would be acting wisely to throw it away from her.

She had met Val at a dance last season and he had sensed her problem at once. He had understanding. He was amazingly long-headed in some respects.

"You're too lovely to be lonely," he had whispered. "Your husband is too ambitious; he thinks of nothing but work; taking silk, more work. He has no time for love, and with an exquisite creature like you, love should come first."

The idea of a liaison appalled her.

It was disloyal. It shocked her sensibilities. Then the winter had come and for a little while she had dismissed the thought of Val, and had tried to concentrate again on Monty. The children intrigued with kindergarten and school curriculum seemed to be slipping away from her. Monty was working harder than ever, and there seemed to be too much to do, for her to enter into his scheme of things. He hoped to take silk in the spring, and he was building up a reputation. He certainly could not afford to slack now for everything depended on his work, and whilst he had to slave so hard there seemed to be no time left for love.

"If he really cared for me he would find the time," she kept telling herself.

Monty, who would approach her bed at night, and kiss her hair, the long ash-blond hair that she had never had cut; Monty, shy and worshipping, but so quiet and reserved with it all. She still loved him acutely; better than Val, of course, but the fact that he had no time for her hurt her pride. She felt wounded about it.

"Next summer things may be better," he said, when she weakly protested.

Then suddenly last week she had learnt that the dream was coming true, and that Monty was taking silk. It would mean less time than ever, and some proper decision must be made.

That was why she had come down here to-day to make that decision. It was spring and the sap was rising.

"I am going down to Neklands for the day," she told him. "Rather nice. Wish I could join you."

Cuttingly she had replied, "But there wouldn't be time?" and he had smarted under her swift gaze. His eyes had dropped to the brief that he had propped against the breakfast coffee-pot. Bitterly hurt, she had come to Neklands alone.

The house was in dust sheets; the big old house that had belonged to the family for four generations. The garden where young feet had learnt to walk, and where age on those same feet had doddered. The trees, green with their lovely fulfilment of the spring.

"I'll eat my sandwiches on the terrace," she told the caretaker. "No, I don't want anything, just to be alone."

She did not want to be worried.

Here she believed that she would find that peace and serenity of thought which were necessary for her to make the decision that would change her life. She knew that she could not go on with the man who had no time for anything save his career. It hurt one's pride too much. It wounded too deeply. Because she had loved him so much, and because she loved him still a great deal too much, it was a wound which seared. While he ignored her, or almost ignored her, life was slipping from Leila into the still backwater of middle age. Life does not offer the same chances to women that it does to men. Men can reconstruct, even in their dotage. Love is not flittered past because the years have mounted up against them. For a woman there is no going back.

A sensitive nature shrank from the consequences of a scandal, yet she knew that she would not get the second chance. It was now or never. She would slip away with Val. Venice. The Tyrol. Cypresses and oleanders, and the white tassels of wild cherry blossoms shaking on a mountain side. Love, perhaps passion, not the deep and tender caring that she had felt for Monty, not that beautiful and sacred love which had made them man and wife and the parents of those two children, but something cruder. Yet for all its crudeness, it would be sweet to her starved nature. Sweet because it represented something for which she ached.

She sat munching at her sandwiches and staring out at the

garden four generations had known and loved, and the pattern of growing that was around her. The last of the scillas had spent their blue against the new green grass. The daffies under the trees had flung down a yellow sheet. The trees themselves, each one of which was called by a name ! That had been a legend in the family, an enduring tradition which had fascinated her so much when she had first come here.

She loved trees. She loved their leafy grandeurs, and the black lace in winter, and the thickening of the swelling buds in spring. The words recurred to her as she sat there :

I think that I shall never see  
A poem as lovely as a tree,  
A tree whose hungry mouth is press'd  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast.  
A tree that looks at God all day  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray.

Around her grew the trees, the tradition of trees, with swelling arms lifted to the Heaven. The wind stirred the prayer in them.

A tree that may in summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair ;  
Upon whose bosom snow has lain  
Who intimately lives with rain,  
Poems were made by fools like me,  
But only God could make a tree !

Tall against the sky they stood around her, in all the intricate pattern of leaf and twig. She looked at them reverently.

When Great-Grandfather had bought the place it had stood in a treeless wild ; now it was leafy. The pattern of living was running thickly in the swelling green buds down the black branches. Every man and woman of the house had planted a tree, symbol of themselves, and had left it, named after them, standing here.

Great-Grandfather himself, though his body rested in the churchyard over the hill, still lived on here in a stout oak, strong and powerful, breasting the hurricane and putting on with the new spring a bronze ripple of growth.

His wife had planted an elm alongside, and the five children, all of whom had chosen elms, stood now in a tall fine belt to the right. Their children's children were the silver birches, tall and straight, which avenued the green walk to the left.

Amongst all this greenery a dark tree glowed. It was Ralph, the son who had run away to Canada and who had never been heard of again.

In his youth he had planted a copper beech, which stood in contrast throughout the summer, deeply redly brown, against the green verdure of the other trees, and symbolical of the heart of the man himself. It was all the pattern of growing, the queer pattern of Great-Grandfather's fancy. This which was the tradition of the trees.

There was Monty's tree, a little oak, and now a coarse dark ivy had climbed up and clung to the branches, almost smothering their loveliness in a cluster of shining leaves. The oak itself was half choked with the virility of the ivy. She watched it from the terrace. There was the tree that she had planted when she had come here first as a bride. Red branches, which in the summer would be a fluttering maze of silver and green, for she had chosen a weeping willow. She had chosen that because she liked the silver lining for ever showing.

She looked out across the grass to the two trees, standing there side by side. Monty, the oak with the tangle of ivy treatening its very life, and Leila, the weeping willow, little and frail, and sighing in the wind. Already these trees outstripped the two who had planted them, and lifted brave arms of leafy loveliness to the sky.

After the first year of marriage, she and Monty had come to Neklands that autumn when the pattern of growing was gold and russet. They had walked among these trees which stood as monuments to the living, and dead alike. It had seemed that the proud spirit of little old Great-Grandfather still lived in the oak, grown wide with age, and that little Great-Grandmother's skirts fluttered more graciously than ever about the elm tree.

For Pearl they had planted a tiny cypress.

The tradition of the trees should live and go on for them, and close to the willow and the oak now, two young cypresses grew in blue green cocoons.



She finished her sandwiches and brushed the crumbs down from her skirt. Here she felt better than she had done for some time ; she could think more clearly. Recently she had been feeling ill. The strain of indecision had been telling on her ; the wound to her pride had been widening. There had been the eternal knowledge that matters were coming to a head with Monty, and that Val was a force to be reckoned with.

She walked down to the springy turf.

She walked to the clusters of budding trees and came to the garden of their own love. That was what Monty had called it when they had planted her willow there in their honeymoon time. The crocuses were withering, and dead, but the grape hyacinths were showing their brave and defiant blue in the border. It was still the garden of their love, nothing could destroy that.

She saw her tree and his, and the two little trees side by side. Tradition. It was the fascinating pattern of growing ; something that she had to put behind her, and not see again. Val's family had no such traditions, they did not cherish so foolish a sentiment as that of trees being the spirits of people. She sat down on the grass and surveyed the scene.

I think that I shall never see  
A poem as lovely as a tree . . .

It struck her now that there was something stunted about Monty's oak ; the buds were not as big as usual ; its growth was not so live and keen. She felt with her hands among the ivy and knew that it was clinging to it and sapping all its strength. Flourishing and virile, it had the tree in a stranglehold. The gardener should have uprooted it long ago, but he knew of the family sentiment in regard to the trees that grew there, and probably for that reason had let the stranglehold continue.

In a way she felt sorry for the oak, and groped down among the ivy roots, until she found the thick, strong-smelling main stem.

"If Monty won't order it to be done, then I'll do it myself," she thought.

It was the last service that she could render the trees, for soon she would be gone away for ever. They would never want her back here again.

She took a little sharp knife from her bag, and laboriously sawed through the ivy stem. The ivy would gradually die, but the oak would flourish. And the oak was Monty. She knelt there close to the roots of the trees, hot and rather tired. Somehow Val seemed far away and unreal, yet it was about Val that she had come here.

The decision had to be made.

As she knelt there, suddenly she was something else. Close to the side of the smaller cypress, and growing near to her in the grass was a small sprig of green. It was another young tree pushing up its spear to the light. It was strong, and green, and vigorous, and it represented new life.

She knelt there staring at it, as though not believing, and all the while the magical pattern of growing went on around her.

As she knelt there sight was given to her blindness, understanding to her lack of comprehension. The little tree was a brave green banner floating out to the world. She put her two hands on either side of it, and laid her lips close to it, and in the garden the tradition of the trees flourished. They were people! This, she knew, was the unborn.

It was such a very little tree.

Monty found her there.

"Leila, what is it? I managed to get away after all?" Then he also saw the little tree pressing upward through the thick grass towards the light of creation. "Why?" he said wonderingly.

"It's the new baby," she told him.

She hadn't realized that she was going to have another one until she had seen the tree. The pattern of growing was not only confined to the garden, but was continuing within her. The decision between Val and Monty had occupied her so much that she had not realized the greatest miracle of all. "Pearl and Alec may be growing up, but there is another one yet. The trees have never lied to us. They *are* us."

Now she knew that she could not go away with Val. She would stay at home and have yet another child, possibly the dearest of all three, and somehow she knew that she was very glad. She loved Monty. She loved him tremendously, and even routine cannot kill real love. It can blind you to the sweetness for a while but it cannot destroy it. She felt

Monty's hands against her own, and his lips possessively demanding. It seemed that they had stepped right into the garden of their own love again.

She let herself drift in the joy of his kiss, then she pulled herself away sharply. "You knew what I was going to do?" she asked.

He nodded. "I'm not blind. I knew it was going on, and I felt that if I could do something really great, be something, get somewhere, then you would think differently about me. I thought I should get you back that way."

His face worked convulsively.

"That wasn't the way, Monty. You've loved your career too well; there wasn't room for both of us in your life."

"I know that now, and I was afraid it was too late. Ambition has ridden me hard. The career came to mean too much." For a moment there was silence, broken only by the sighing of the trees, bending together to lift their "prayers to God." Then he said, "That is why I am giving it up."

"Giving it up? What about taking silk?"

Again the silence gauche and awkward, and again the rustle of the trees praying for them, as they swayed together.

Then he spoke. "You see, I love you. I love you more than my career. It had to be one or the other; it couldn't be both. It's been worrying me to death, and now I know what is the right course for me to pursue. I'm going to tear the thing up, tear it out by the roots."

"You would do that for me, Monty."

Then he did love her. It had not died. He still felt for her as she had always felt for him.

"Anything to keep you. If the career has come between us, then it must go. It was suffocating me, you know."

She indicated the oak with the smother of dark, strong-smelling ivy. Her voice trembled a little as she spoke. "I cut through the stem," she said, "and though the ivy will die, with its gloss of leaves, the oak will live. And the oak is the worthier of the two. It seems . . . it seems as though there were more in it than we really thought. The new little tree. The ivy?"

"The trees made answer," he said, and held her hand closely in his own.

She had forgotten Val. For a moment she wondered

whether she was doing right to accept so great a sacrifice, but suddenly she knew that she was doing what the trees had asked of her. For with all thoughts of disloyalty, there had faded a happiness which could never have been real because of the treachery underlying it.

She felt that the trees standing round her were sentinels of her peace of mind. They were as Monty had said in the beginning, something more than trees. They were a tradition.



J. J. BELL  
*The Waiter at the Planet*

J. J. Bell, journalist and author, was probably best known as the creator of "Wee Macgregor" and other amusing Scottish characters, but he also wrote a large number of novels and one-act plays.



## THE WAITER AT THE PLANET

THE host had been entertaining, the man on her left adoring, her cousin Maggie more or less amusing; and it was not till dinner was over that Elfrida's grey eyes chanced to encounter the face of the man who had waited on the little party.

Elfrida caught her breath, lamps of amazement shone in her grey eyes, and a rose was born on her fair face. Next moment the lamps were out, the rose gone, and her gaze was on the cloth while she listened, or appeared to listen, to a remark of her lover's. As for the waiter, a tall, dark young man, far from ill-looking, his only emotion, if such it might be termed, was betrayed by a sudden firming of the lips; but then it was not his first time of noticing the girl.

"Well," said the host, snapping shut his watch, "what about it? It's one of those mystery plays, and——"

Seven minutes later they took their seats in a box at the Imperial. Had you looked in then you would probably have noted that cousin Maggie, a girl of more weight than is fashionable to-day, but of considerable personal attraction, manœuvred to leave all space available between the two pairs of chairs, and you might have suspected a desire to keep her host, a hearty bachelor of forty-two, as much to herself as possible. As a matter of fact, Maggie's motive was disinterested. She had got it into that small, clever head of hers, under its corn-yellow waves, that Alan Masters was on the verge of proposing to her cousin—and high time, too!—and that Elfrida was ready to answer "yes." Judging from the young man's behaviour during dinner, Maggie was satisfied that no mystery play, however intense, would distract his interest from lovely Elfrida.

Well, Maggie's assumption was to be justified up to a point. In the course of the first interval, by cautious questioning, she gathered that Alan's mind was almost a blank



as to the happenings in the first act, while Elfrida had not even guessed at a possible arch-villain. Wherefore, when the curtain fell on the second act, she whispered to her host a wish for a turn outside, to which he willingly acceded, and stepped from the box in a state of bubbling anticipation, which found vent in the words, "Oh, George, I feel sure something thrilling is going to happen!" To which her old friend George replied: "I'll bet you it was the parson who committed the murder."

And something did happen, as Maggie perceived on re-entering the box. But she perceived also that it had been nothing of a joyous nature. Alan was undisguisedly glum, and Elfrida's smile had trouble behind. Still, the third act was what George called "a corker," and it was only when the last curtain had fallen that Maggie began to realize how her foresight had been at fault, at least with regard to her cousin.

Elfrida complained of a headache, begged to be excused from the supper dance planned by the host, and expressed a wish to be sent home alone in a taxi. Maggie, her cousin's guest for the night, insisted on going with her, and after some mild wrangling, and in spite of George's efforts to effect a compromise—he proposed that they should run Elfrida down to Kensington and come back to supper—she carried her point. The drive was a silent one. Elfrida seemed to have nothing to say, and Maggie, though sorely puzzled, forbore for once to ask questions.

"Thank goodness mother has gone early to bed. Evidently no bridge to-night," Elfrida remarked, as they entered the hall of a handsome house, with a quiet evidence of luxury. "Come to my room, Maggie. I've got something to say to you."

In the boudoir a fire was burning, though the September night was mild.

"Sit down. Smoke, if you want to," said Elfrida, throwing aside her cloak. She dropped into an easy chair, stared at the fire for a minute or two, then faced her cousin. "I know you have been expecting it," she began abruptly, "and so I think I ought to tell you, once and for all, that to-night, while you were away from the box, Alan asked me to marry him, and—and I told him I couldn't."

"But why on earth did you tell him that?"

"Because it was the truth. I don't care for him—enough."

Maggie shrugged her plump white shoulders. "Its funny, but I thought you cared for him no end—and I'm sure he thought so too, poor boy!"

"Oh, no, Maggie!"

"But, oh, yes, Elfrida! How could he think otherwise? He has been at your feet for the last two years, and you have never discouraged him."

"I've never encouraged him!"

"Can you say that? You have at least favoured him before all the others. Do be frank—it's so unlike you to be the other thing—and tell me just why you have turned down poor Alan."

"I—I don't know." Elfrida looked like tears.

"Oh, nonsense! Whatever has changed you, it must be something that happened very suddenly—very recently. When did it happen? I could have sworn you were in love with him when we were having those scrumptious ices——"

Elfrida's head went up. "I've never been in love with Alan," she said. "I'll admit I've been fond of him—I did like him better than the others—but now I think I must have fancied myself much fonder than I really was."

"Heigh-ho!" said Maggie, ironically.

"I can't explain it any other way," her cousin replied, drooping again.

"But if he had asked you earlier, say before the theatre, you would not have refused him—would you?"

"Perhaps not. How can I tell—now?"

"What happened to change your feelings towards him?"

"My feelings didn't change. I only discovered that they were not strong enough."

"H'm! And what," demanded persistent Maggie—"what led you to that astonishing discovery?"

"Why do you ask me that? Surely my own reason——"

"I'm sure it wasn't your own reason, which normally is quite sane. Something happened! What was it?"

Elfrida threw out her hands. "Maggie, I can't tell you."

"You won't?"

"I can't—because I'm not absolutely certain. I've got to think it out."

"I'd sleep it off if I were you. You've got what the Scotch

call 'a bee in your bonnet.'" Maggie got up. "I can see you want to be alone," she said, kindly. "If you feel like telling me in the morning, good and well; if not, I'm still your friend. I want only to help, you know." She kissed her cousin and made for the door.

"You're a dear," said Elfrida. "Maggie!"

"Yes?" Maggie halted. "What is it, Frida?"

"Would you mind staying here another night, and dining with me at the—the same place? Just ourselves."

"At the Planet, you mean?"

Elfrida nodded.

"Why, that would be ripping—and, of course, I'll stay! But what's the idea?"

"Just a—a fancy."

Maggie's brows went up for an instant. "All right, dear; that's settled. Good night!" She stepped to the door.

"Maggie!"

"Yes?"

"I meant to ask you whether you noticed the waiter who served us to-night. A silly question at this moment, but it just came into my head. You noticed him?"

"Rather! A charming young man! But his face was quite familiar to me."

"What!" Elfrida started. "I heard you tell George that it was your first time at the Planet."

"So it was. But for all that, the waiter's face was familiar."

"Don't tell me you—you've met him—somewhere——"

"Oh, get out! Still, it's rather interesting, and if I were a romantic maiden—but never mind that! You know Mrs. Brown's tea-room up Shaftesbury way?"

Elfrida nodded.

"Mrs. Brown—not her real name—is an old friend of my people—but you know that, too?"

"Yes. *Please* go on!"

"Don't get excited. You know also that I come into town every week—sometimes twice—for my singing lesson?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, after my lesson I as a rule drop into Mrs. Brown's for a cup of tea. It's early in the afternoon—about three."

"And what then?"

"I never drop in without seeing the nice-looking waiter there—drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. Of course,

he's a customer then, and doesn't look the least like a waiter. I suppose he has nothing to do in the early part of the afternoon and—well, that's all. I think you ought to go to bye-bye at once, old thing. You're looking done up. Have you got some aspirins handy?"

"Oh, yes. He didn't seem to recognize you to-night—did he?"

"Why on earth should he, even if he had ever noticed me in Mrs. Brown's? Besides, a waiter may be a gentleman!"

"And a gentleman a waiter," murmured Elfrida.

"What did you say?" asked Maggie, from the door.

"Oh, nothing. I don't know what I'm saying." Elfrida yawned—artificially. "Good night, dear. I'll be all right in the morning."

Maggie's glance was curious, and she appeared about to speak, but after a moment, with a nod she opened the door and went out.

Elfrida drew the easy chair nearer to the hearth and lay back, gazing with half-veiled eyes at the ruddy fire. She was haunted by a memory of five years ago—a memory that went to a tune.

About eight o'clock on the following evening the head-waiter at the Planet ushered the cousins to a table and removed therefrom a card bearing the word "Reserved." The young waiter made them a grave inclination and proceeded with his duties.

"Why," exclaimed Maggie, "this is exactly where we were sitting lest night!"

"Yes." Elfrida paused and, with something of an effort, added: "I rang up this afternoon to engage the same table."

"H'm!" said Maggie non-committally. Her eyes moved from her cousin's face to that of the waiter, who was fetching something from a side-table.

"Maggie," whispered Elfrida, "please have patience with me. Talk about something that—that isn't in your mind, and keep on talking."

Maggie smiled. "An odd way to put it, but I'll do my best." And she did.

And somehow the dinner progressed to the coffee stage. The orchestra had just finished a selection. The head-

waiter was making one of his tours of the room. Elfrida signed to him, took a pencil from her bag, and wrote a line on the back of the menu-card.

"Would it be possible," she asked, with a delicious little smile, "to induce the band to play this—as an extra—now?"

The head waiter read the pencilled words, "Serenade from 'Millions d'Arlequin.'" "But certainly, madam!" he said. "It is an old favourite, though nobody has requested it for some little time."

"If there is any charge—" she began, diffidently.

His gesture was magnificent. "You shall have the Serenade in two minutes, madam, and I think you will say that our musicians play it well." With a bow he departed.

"That dear old sentimental thing!" said Maggie. "What made you think of it?"

Elfrida leaned forward. She was nervous and paler than usual. "Maggie, when the music starts, will you watch the waiter, please? I want to know whether it has any—any meaning for him. Don't look at me like that, dear! Afterwards I'll answer any questions you want to ask."

"Righto!" said Maggie, resignedly.

"Last night a mystery play; to-night a mystery dinner!"

At the first quiet notes of the Serenade—one of those melodies, simple, wistful, tender, that may happen to a composer, if he be fortunate, once in a lifetime and linger in the memory of a hearer for many a day and night—Elfrida's head went down, her hand fell to toying with the stem of her glass. She experienced a desire to peep at the waiter, who was standing at attention a little way off, but she found she could not raise her eyes, and the most she could do was to steal a sidelong glance, which took in nothing above his waist. Yet she saw—or thought she saw—a sign that might be an answer to the music. His hand holding a napkin was closed, as it seemed, in a grip almost fierce.

"Elfrida," presently murmured Maggie. "He——"

"Not now, not now, Maggie," she whispered back. "Tell me afterwards."

The Serenade sighed itself out to a slight ripple of applause. Elfrida opened her bag, laid money on the cloth, and, with a movement, summoned the waiter.

He presented the bill on a plate, and at her nod, picked up and placed the money thereon, and retired.

"Frida," said Maggie, with a suppressed excitement, "who is he?"

"Afterwards—afterwards! Don't look astonished at anything I may do." Elfrida put her hand to her heart, one of her little ways when moved.

The waiter returned and put down the plate with its cluster of silver pieces.

"Thank you," said Elfrida, and transferred the last coin to her bag.

Afterwards Maggie declared that the waiter heaved a sigh of relief. At all events, he said, as he removed the empty plate:

"Thank you, madam—very much."

"Waiter!" said Elfrida, not looking up.

He paused in his going. "Yes, ma'am?"

"We enjoy this restaurant and may come again, quite often"—it sounded rather like a rehearsed speech—"and if so, we should prefer this table. May we know your name?"

"Certainly, ma'am. It is Frederick."

Before she knew, her eyes flashed upwards in a glance of incredulity—then fell. She blushed.

"Frederick Morland, ma'am," he said, a trifle stiffly.

"I beg—oh, very well," she stammered, and turned helplessly to her cousin. "Isn't it time we were going?"

"It is!" was Maggie's dry reply, as she rose. Possibly the reminder seemed necessary, for she added: "We left our wraps in the cloak-room, didn't we?"

Elfrida got up.

"Good evening, waiter," she said with a certain sweet dignity.

"Good evening, ma'am—and thank you," he answered, and bowed somewhat haughtily.

"Good evening," said Maggie, with an irrepressible twinkle. "It has been a lovely little dinner."

"Delighted—" He stopped short, reddening. "Good evening, ma'am."

Elfrida declined conversation till they were home and in her boudoir. Her mother was out at a bridge party.

"Now," said Maggie firmly, "you are going to lie on the couch and tell me all about Frederick."

"I can't lie down. I'm too restless." And Elfrida seated

herself on a straight-backed chair. "I never felt so wretched in all my life—and so helpless! And I behaved like a perfect idiot when he told me his name was Frederick."

"What did you expect his name to be?"

"Dick, of course—Dick Merriman. I suppose 'Frederick' is assumed for his present position."

Merriman!" Maggie's eyes opened wide. "Not—not the boy you told me about ages ago—the nephew of the Mr. Merriman who married your Aunt Annabel? Poor things, what a tragedy that was! But it's impossible! The man who waited on us last night and to-night——"

"Is Dick Merriman and no other."

"The boy you fell in love with five years ago!"

"Don't be silly, Maggie! I was only eighteen, and I met him only once—at the Setons' house——"

"But you and he danced the whole night together! You told me! And now you meet him at the Planet as a waiter—how utterly romantic!"

"Romantic! Wait till you know the truth, Maggie. He——"

"Tell me—did they play the Serenade at that dance?"

"Yes; several times, as a waltz."

"I see! And so to-night you got the band to play it to remind——"

"I wanted to make absolutely certain that he was really Dick. You see, he had a moustache—a small one—five years ago. He was just back from Palestine—not very fit—and was afraid he would have to leave the Army. He had been brought up by his uncle and——"

"One moment," interposed Maggie. "Don't you want to know what happened when the band began to play the Serenade?"

"I don't think so—now," said Elfrida, drearily. "I ought to have considered that if it did remind him of—of anything, it would only annoy or, maybe, hurt him."

"Perhaps it hurt a little," said Maggie, softly. "At the fourth or fifth bar I saw his face change—lose its sort of stern look—and then his eyes turned to you——"

"Angry, I expect."

Maggie shook her head. "No; sad, my dear, just awfully sad."

"And then?" murmured Elfrida.

"That was all. Next moment he was his stiff self again."

That was the only time I noticed him weaken, except when you didn't give him a tip."

"I couldn't—though perhaps he needed it." Elfrida sighed. "Are you quite sure it—it was sad, Maggie?"

"Absolutely! Did you expect him to be amused?"

"I was afraid he would hate me, as well he might."

"But, dearest of kids, why?"

Elfrida brushed her hand across her eyes, got up, and began to move about. "It's a hateful situation," she began, presently, "but I must make it all clear to you, because afterwards I'm going to ask your help. I've got to bring mother into the story, and you must promise not to misjudge her. Had I been mother's age at the time, and gone through the years of hardship that she had gone through, I should probably have acted just as she did. Promise you won't misjudge her."

"I'll try not to misjudge anybody, dear." Maggie threw out her hand and caught her cousin's. "Do come and sit down. You're working yourself—and me, too—into a state of jumps, whereas, since the thing is serious, we ought to be discussing it as calmly as possible."

"I dare say you're right," Elfrida allowed, after submitting to be gently pushed into a corner of the couch; "but I can't help raging at the injustice of it all. However," she went on, "here's the story, or as much as I know of it. It was on the day of the dance, five years ago, that my people got the first news of Aunt Annabel's marriage to Mr. Merriman, in Italy. Dick—I'll call him Dick to avoid confusing him with his uncle—had heard of it, too, and it gave us both something to talk about at the dance. Dick, I remember, was rather amused. The two old things had met in an hotel, fallen in love within a week, and got married as quickly as they could."

"Dick didn't resent it?" put in Maggie.

"I'm sure he didn't. He seemed to be devoted to his uncle, who had, he told me, done everything for him. He was looking forward to welcoming the young couple, as he called them, on their return to London. They were due the very next day. They stayed, I think, a week in London—I saw Aunt Annabel once, mother saw her several times, but we never met Mr. Merriman—and then they started off to spend a month or two in the South of Ireland. And in a fog the steamer——"



"Yes, I remember. Dreadful! Mr. Merriman was drowned——"

"He went down with the ship. Aunt Annabel was rescued, but died a few hours after." Elfrida paused. "But, Maggie," she went on, "here is the thing that concerns us now. Mr. Merriman, by a new will, left everything—everything, mind!—to Aunt Annabel. Aunt Annabel, by an old will, left everything to her only sister, my mother. You, of course, know what a difference it meant to mother and me. From having to count the ha'pence we were suddenly free to play with the pounds—for it was really a huge lot of money that came to mother. It didn't make her a miser, but she has always had the dread that, somehow, it might be taken from her. She doesn't mind buying things, but she won't give a penny away.

Maggie nodded, as one who understands. "Have you any idea why Dick got nothing?" she asked presently.

"I've been wondering why ever since. If I had not heard Dick talk as he did at the dance, I should say that he had a quarrel with his uncle over the marriage, but I feel sure there was no quarrel of that sort."

"And your mother—I mean with regard to Dick?"

"You must remember that mother had never met Dick. She heard of him only through the lawyers—and me. You must remember, too, that I was only eighteen, and mother still treated me as an infant."

"And so you did nothing?"

Elfrida sat up. "Maggie, I did what I could. I tried to get mother to give Dick a share—a half, I began with. But she would not give a hundredth part. Then I tried to get her to give him an allowance, as his uncle had done—and she said she would. It was quite a long time afterwards that I learned, by chance, of the allowance she offered him through the lawyers. It was a—an insult! And then I heard that Dick had left the Army and gone abroad, and I never saw him again till last night. And that's the end of the story."

"I wonder!" murmured Maggie. "Seems to me awfully like the beginning. But now I understand why poor Alan had no chance last night. This Dick of yours has been there all the time."

"Don't talk nonsense! There's no sentiment in the

thing—don't be imagining anything of the sort, Maggie."

"No sentiment! Then why introduce the Serenade?"

"Oh, be quiet! Can't you see what's tormenting me? For five years he has been poor, or, at least, doing without things he was brought up to expect would always be his, while I've been living in luxury and having the best of good times on the money—or part of it—that ought to have been his. It's shameful—unendurable!"

"You leave out your mother, Frida."

"Mother's different. There's no use in bringing her into it. She would refuse to see the point. She has ignored it in the past. But for goodness' sake don't fancy she grudges her daughter anything. Do you know, Maggie, she allows me eight hundred a year—and I spend it all!"

"Quite a decent allowance, too. Still, I've seen you spend money—on myself, for instance—and have guessed you had more than a pound a month." Maggie lit a cigarette and looked thoughtful. After a little while she said, "And what are you going to do about it? Dine at the Planet once a week—with me as your guest, of course!—and leave a ten-pound note under your napkin?"

"Don't try to be funny! I intend to make Dick take a share of my allowance. I shall manage nicely on half of it."

"You impossible creature! Why, all you know about this young man is that you once danced with him."

"Nearly the whole evening! Besides, we're sort of relations. What are you laughing at?"

"Swallowed some smoke." To prove her words Maggie coughed long and violently. On recovery she said, "And you think he will accept your money?"

"I tell you it's *his* money."

"Even so, will he accept it?"

"Acceptance implies offering, and I didn't say I was going to offer it. I said I was going to *make* him take it."

"There's an old proverb about a horse that isn't thirsty."

"Old fiddlesticks! Maggie, will you help me?"

Maggie wrinkled her brows. "I'd love to," she said, slowly; "but as a go-between—h'm!"

"I'm not asking you to go near Dick, or have any communication with him. Will you help me?" Elfrida was twittering with anxiety.

"Sure thing!"

"You darling ! Well—" There was a pause.

"Out with it !" said Maggie.

"It's quite a simple matter for you," said Elfrida. "Just for a moment I felt like funking it for myself. But I'll do it—I *must* do it. Maggie !"

"Go on, dear."

"Maggie, to-morrow, early in the day, I want you to introduce me to your friend, Mrs. Brown, and——"

"That's easy. But what's the idea ?"

"—and to promise me that, after to-morrow, you won't go to her tea-room till I give you leave. That's all."

This time Maggie swallowed some real smoke.

The arrangement between Elfrida and Mrs. Brown is their affair. Enough for us to know that it meant no hardship to some less fortunate girl, and to be enlightened as to its results.

Dick Merriman, in his accustomed corner of the tea-room, looked up from his newspaper to give his order, and, with a start, found himself staring at the pale face of Elfrida. She was far too nervous to blush, and it was he who coloured. For an instant he looked like smiling, but only for an instant.

"H'm ! Large white coffee, please," he said, and returned to his paper, though possibly not to its news.

"Thank you, sir," replied Elfrida in a voice that seemed to her like a shriek, but was really inaudible, and retired.

She came back with the coffee, a third of it in the saucer.

"Never mind—it's all right. Thanks," he muttered, without looking at her—until she was in retreat.

Elfrida did not go near his table again that afternoon. She was feeling as though she had done a heavy day's work. Yet she had her courage, and on the next afternoon she was there for his order. He gave it without raising his head. She brought it, with scarcely any in the saucer.

"Thanks," he murmured, absently.

On the third morning she made up her mind that she would say "Isn't it a lovely day ?"—quite casually, of course—and rehearsed the speech before her mirror ; but, alas, when the moment arrived she took stage-fright, as it were, and emitted only a tiny squeak, to which her customer paid, as she congratulated herself, no attention. On the fourth afternoon, however, the words came out clearly—"Isn't it a lovely day\_?"

"Rather!" he assented, with a backward glance at the streaming window, but none at her.

Whereupon she blushed abundantly, calling herself an idiot.

The following day was Sunday, and she spent most of it in wondering whether she was not merely making a fool of herself, and in forebodings of Dick's being scared away from Mrs. Brown's. But on the Monday afternoon he came in and took his usual place, behind his newspaper, and she felt absurdly relieved. It occurred to her, as a discreet insinuation of friendliness, to take him his coffee without the formality of first approaching him for his order. This she did, without spilling a drop. But she was fortunate in that she had placed it safely on the table before the unexpected happened.

He laid down the paper and regarded her with kind, frank eyes.

"Miss Hereford," he said gently, "why are you doing this?"

She was taken aback, though the question was one of those which she had warned herself must come, sooner or later. Yet she held her ground by answering, not without an effort:

"Mr. Merriman, why are you doing it at the Planet?"

"That happens to be my business," he replied gravely, "but this is not yours."

Now that the barrier was broken she felt a little surer of herself. "I don't mean to be impertinent—" she began.

"You aren't!" he put in pleasantly.

"But why does it happen to be your business, Mr. Merriman?"

"I will answer your question in one obvious word—necessity," he said. "Can you answer mine—why are you doing this—as simply?"

"Yes, I can—necessity."

He looked down at his cigarette, saying: "The same thing—only different!"

"Yes; my necessity is much worse than yours."

"The imaginary," he said softly, "is usually worse than the real." He looked up suddenly. "I hope you don't resent the fact that I recognize that you are being kind to me."

Defiantly she drew herself up. "There is no kindness

about it ; but I will admit that I have taken this way—writing seemed hopeless—of getting in touch with you. Of course, I should never have spoken if you had not spoken first."

"Did I speak first?"

"You said : 'Large white coffee.'"

"So I did!" he solemnly agreed. "Then is there something I can do for you, Miss Hereford?"

"Yes."

"Or rather, something you think I can do?"

"You can—you must!" She turned her head sharply, and so missed his slight head-shake and ironic smile.

People were beginning to come into the tea-room, which for the past hour had been almost deserted.

Turning back to him she said hurriedly : "It is impossible for us to talk here, Mr. Merriman."

"Quite impossible. And it is impossible for me to go on sitting here while you stand. It was only because of——"

"I know, I know. But what is to be done?" Only the thought of her mother's action of five years ago prevented her asking him to the house. "Oh, you haven't touched your coffee!" she exclaimed irrelevantly.

"I love it cold—if possible, with a skim on top," he said lightly. "I am going to make a desperate venture," he went on. "Will you honour me by lunching with me to-morrow?" A faint smile. "Not at the Planet, but at a little place called 'The Roadside,' in Newport Street? One o'clock. I would be there, awaiting you. I have, unfortunately, no free afternoons ; I go on duty at four."

"Thank you," she faltered, suddenly unsure of herself again, "I shall be there at one."

"And you will not come here again?" he said gently.

Whereat her spirit revived and she answered : "I shall be waitress here as long as you are waiter at the Planet! Good afternoon!"

During lunch, at her request, he told her, readily enough, his history of the five years.

"Soon after the tragedy," he said, "I learned that I was of no further use as a soldier. As I had had no training for business I decided to go abroad. A friend invited me to take a share in his ranch, and I put what money I had into his farm. The farm seemed to have a hole in it. Besides, there's a little

trouble in my left arm that unfits me for heavy labour. At the end of three years the hole had got so big that the farm fell into it. And I came home to look for a job. I was still looking when, ten months ago, a man stopped me in the street. He and I had been in the trenches together, so we didn't need to exchange cards. He was a sort of under-manager at the Planet, and I was grateful when he wangled me in as a waiter. And I assure you, Miss Hereford, a waiter's at the Planet isn't a half bad job."

"You like it?" she asked quickly.

"I like it a long way better than unemployment." He twirled his glass. "Perhaps one of the chief drawbacks is that the band sometimes plays the wrong tune, thereby recalling things that happened when one was not a waiter."

Elfrida felt her face grow hot. "You have not told me," she said hastily, "about your uncle. You and he quarrelled, I suppose. But perhaps I ought not to ask you that."

"We had a difference. He was easily angered, poor man, though, as a rule, he cooled down speedily."

"May I believe," said the girl timidly, "that your difference had nothing to do with his marriage to my aunt?"

"Indeed, you may believe that, Miss Hereford. I am sure your aunt and I would have become great friends. Honestly, I was glad about the marriage for my uncle's sake."

"And you are sure, too, I think, that your uncle would have got over his anger if he had lived a little longer—perhaps only a few days longer. Aren't you sure of that, too?"

"Who knows? Why go into it at this time of day, Miss Hereford?"

"Late as it is, we must go into it, Mr. Merriman. You have suffered the most frightful injustice, and my mother and I are much to blame. If you don't actually hate us——"

"Please!"

"But I must say it! I must do what——"

"No!" His tone was soft but very firm. "You must say and do—nothing. And please do not spoil the biggest treat I've had in months and months," he continued. "You have honoured me greatly. Don't put me in the dust. You know I couldn't resist the chance of meeting and speaking with you, after those five long years. But don't make me feel that I was wrong as well as weak."

There was a pause till she said: "I don't want to spoil

things ; I want only to put them right. Is your pride a more precious thing than my conscience ?”

“Your conscience,” he answered gently, “has lost its way and wandered into your too-pitiful heart.”

“You say that because I’m a girl !”

“Yes ; because you are a girl. And now let us choose what ices we shall have.”

She smiled in spite of herself.

“Tell me this, if you will,” she said ; “was the difference with your uncle over a very serious matter ?”

“It was very serious to me,” he replied. “But I can’t think yet why it should have been so serious to him. Still, the poor old chap hated to be thwarted in any way.”

“Then you didn’t—unintentionally, I mean—injure him in any way ?”

“In no way, unintentionally or otherwise. I’ve no regrets on that score.”

“Forgive my asking such a question,” she said. “But you see what your answer means. It means simply that you have been unjustly treated, and that it is your duty to accept some repara——”

“Miss Hereford, you are hurting me more than I can tell you. For Heaven’s sake give up your beautiful idea of——”

“I will never give it up, Mr. Merriman ! But”—with a look of compunction—“I will give you peace for the present. I’m afraid I’ve been a rude, rude guest. Please, may I have a raspberry ice ?”

She made one more effort, however, just after he had paid the bill.

“Although you had had no training, Mr. Merriman, with some money you could have become a partner in a business, and learned that business gradually. Isn’t that so ?”

“That is so,” he gravely replied. “Still, don’t you think I make a pretty smart waiter ?”

On the pavement he inquired her destination.

“Mrs. Brown’s, of course !”

“Then good-bye,” he said, and was gone.

In the evening she had a dance engagement. Coming home early, she found her mother still in the drawing-room.

“No ; Alan was not there,” she said, in reply to a question.

"And to save you wondering, dear, I may tell you that I've found I don't want to marry Alan."

"You're always finding you don't want to marry somebody!" returned Mrs. Hereford, who within the hour had dropped four-and-sixpence at bridge.

"Not quite always," said Elfrida. "By the way, mother, about the allowance you so generously make me—where does it come from? I mean, does it come from any particular investment?"

"I understand it comes from a lot of War Loan things, exactly how much I don't remember, which I asked the lawyers to keep separate on your account. Why do you ask?"

"It would be all the same, wouldn't it, if I had the War Loan things in my own hands?"

Mrs. Hereford forgot about the four-and-sixpence. "My dear, what do you mean?"

"I should like very much if you would instruct your lawyers to pass them over to me. I'd like to have them handy in case I should get married one of these days."

"Married!" Mrs. Hereford restrained herself. "Who is it now?" she coldly inquired.

"A waiter."

"A what?"

"A waiter, mother. His name is Dick Merriman, and we've been living on his money for five years."

"How dare you, Elfrida! The money was my poor sister's. As for that wretched young man, who, as the lawyers informed me, actually laughed at my most generous offer, I had hoped he had gone abroad for good. Where is he now?"

"At the Planet Restaurant."

"You have actually seen him?"

"Quite often. I lunched with him to-day."

"Lunched! Great Heaven, child, how can you be so stupidly—sentimental? And has he had the impudence to try to—er—entangle you?"

"On the contrary, dear, I'm trying hard to entangle him. If he asks me, I shall marry him. It's the least I can do."

"Marry a waiter in a restaurant! Girl, you're crazy!"

"Sometimes the waiters are nicer than the customers. My waiter is, anyway."

"He wants your money—that's it!" snapped Mrs. Hereford.



"The trouble is that he doesn't want my money," returned Elfrida. "But he's got to have it, somehow. The only way I see at the moment is marriage. So in the morning, mother, you might give me a note to your lawyers——"

"I shall stop your allowance—that's what I'll do!" cried the distracted lady.

"That won't prevent my marrying my waiter—if he asks me. I rather like him, you know. I suppose I should have to start a little greengrocery, or something to help to make ends meet."

"Elfrida!"

"But if, after we were married, he found he had got ten thousand pounds or so, along with me, he might perhaps stop being a waiter. See?"

"Elfrida, be serious!"

Suddenly the girl faced her parent, crying: "Mother, don't I look serious?"

Mrs. Hereford gazed and was mute. The white face, with its troubled eyes and sad, pretty mouth, were answer enough. And, after all, this was her daughter, the only one. She held her arms.

Next day, after a satisfactory chat with her mother's lawyers, Elfrida went to the tea-room with a certain lightness of heart. But Dick did not appear. Days passed and his old place knew him not. She wondered if he were ill, and one night she induced Maggie to peep into the Planet. Dick, Maggie reported, was there all right. She could not swear to his being in robust health.

Then Elfrida's spirit threatened to fail her. Yet she had vowed to wait at Mrs. Brown's as long as Dick waited at the Planet. And at Mrs. Brown's she waited, in more senses than one. The days were not more unhappy than the nights. Conscience became comatose; only her heart ached—and ached. Her mother, after that little outburst of loving kindness, had slipped back into the old mental obfuscation of her eternal bridge. Maggie had lost patience and gone with a party to Paris. Elfrida felt lonely, yet preferred to be alone.

Five weeks had passed when Dick once more walked into Mrs. Brown's. Roses bloomed in Elfrida's cheeks, only to die. Dick looked so sad and weary as he sank into his old corner.

Without spilling more than half of it, she brought him his coffee.

Without thanks or preface he said : "I've come to implore you to stop it."

"What?" she exclaimed with unreal levity ; "stop it, just when I'm beginning to enjoy it?"

"It's making you ill. You look awfully wearied. It's plucky, but——"

"Didn't you expect to find me here?"

"Oh, yes. I've watched you go in every day since we last met. Please tell me that you will give it up."

"Are you giving up the Planet?"

"No."

"Then——"

"One moment, please. I've got the night off from the Planet. I came to ask you to dine with me at 'The Roadside'—seven-thirty. Will you?"

"Yes," she answered, and turned away to one of the windows, her eyes wet.

Leaving money on the table, he went out.

Elfrida went home early and put on her prettiest dinner frock. When they met he apologized for not being in evening kit—didn't want to look like a waiter. Somehow they both laughed. It was a good beginning.

"Let's dine happily," he whispered.

"I shan't persecute," she replied.

A waiter took her cloak. For a moment she stood before Dick, silent, in her finery. Dick's heart failed him. She was so much lovelier than five years ago. Then he pulled himself together to "dine happily."

And it was quite a cheerful little dinner, though neither, perhaps, could have told why. When it was over he asked whether she would care for a picture-house.

"I'd rather just walk around," she replied ; "it's such a lovely night."

So they walked around, goodness knew whither, but at the end of an hour or so they found themselves in some old-fashioned "gardens," where was no traffic and scarce a sound, save that of an ancient gramophone behind an open window. Their talk was still impersonal, but it was failing. Never once had the girl's "conscience" spoken ; possibly the thought of

the money was no longer alert in her mind. It seemed that she was content to drift.

Rather abruptly the man said :

"It's time I was taking you home, but there's one thing I want to tell you."

As by a tacit arrangement they came to a stop in the black shadow of a tree. From the window near at hand blared the gramophone in an obsolete foxtrot.

"I want to tell you," he resumed, "that I've decided to go abroad again. I shall go almost immediately. A day's notice is all that is required at the Planet."

So he had beaten her after all ! For a space Elfrida was unable to find speech, conscious of a devastating sense of defeat. Yet she fought against it.

"What are you going to do abroad ?" she said at last, rather coldly.

"I dare say I shall find something to do before long."

"You have suddenly tired of being a waiter ?"

"I shall probably be a waiter abroad," was his reply.

"Oh !" And she realized that she was making him go abroad. "That means, of course, that I remain at Mrs. Brown's."

"Not at all. You said you would remain at Mrs. Brown's as long as I remained at the Planet—and you are a girl of your word, as you have already shown. To-morrow will be my last day at the Planet."

"But need you go abroad merely in order to—to beat me ?"

He was silent, and in the pause the gramophone ceased.

"Will you tell me," she said, with difficulty, "just when you decided on this ? It must have been since you called at Mrs. Brown's this afternoon."

Looking into the dark garden he answered : "It was when you took off your cloak to-night."

And she was silent. But the gramophone began again.

Blessed old groggy gramophone—thrice blessed ! Not blaring this time, but soft and sweet as a worn record would allow, it sent forth the wistful notes of the Serenade, drawing two sorry young hearts forth and together.

"Elfrida ! Elfrida !"

"Oh, Dick !"

And with the last note——

"But, Elfrida, you can't—you *can't* marry a waiter!"

"N-not unless he asks me," said Elfrida.

And later—in the taxi——

"Dick, I keep wondering about your uncle. You must have thwarted him pretty badly."

"Well," said Dick, "I've been in love with you for five years."

"M'm! I must try to believe you—but I was thinking about your uncle."

"So was I, poor old chap! For I can tell you now why we differed. When I met him, on the day after our dance, almost the first thing he told me was that he had chosen a wife for me——"

"Oh! Who was she? Tell me at once!"

"Don't know. You see, I had to tell him ~~he~~ was too late."

"Then—then, oh, Dick, it was all my fault!"

"All your fault, beloved!"



PERCEVAL GIBBON  
*The English Tutor*

Perceval Gibbon was educated in Germany and as a young man served in British, French and American ships. He travelled extensively as a journalist and war-correspondent in many parts of the world, and during the Great War served in the Royal Marines. He published several novels and volumes of short stories, of which the most popular were *The Vrouw Grobelaar's Leading Cases*, *Adventures of Miss Gregory* and *Those Who Smiled*.



## THE ENGLISH TUTOR

THE bitter miles of the road, rough with frost-crisped mud that bruised his feet through the broken soles of his shoes, had taken toll of his endurance ; the early dark of the Russian November afternoon, venomous with cold, had gathered in about him over the featureless and desert lands. Somewhere in that solitude and desolation there lurked the house which he had come forth to seek—the fabled criminal house, whose directions had been given to him in a flutter of whispers—where food was to be had, a sackful for a diamond ring, a truckload for a pair of sound boots. The rumour of its existence had currency in the misery of Moscow like a tale of buried treasure.

“There are no other houses near it. The village is farther on. It stands alone.”

It was the woman whom once or twice he had seen and passed on the stairs of the great appartement-building which housed him who had told him that. He had never before spoken to her, but he thought he remembered to have heard that she was a nun, escaped with her life, at least, from the plunder and destruction of her convent. She had been coming down the stairs when he returned from his shuddering day-long wait in the four-deep queue at one of the Soviet's depots of edible garbage. He had a loaf in the pocket of his overcoat ; as they neared each other her eyes went to the bulge it made and rose thence to his face. He smiled faintly and ruefully and drew aside to let her pass.

Instead of passing she stood still on the step above him and continued to look at him.

Godfrey Hope was a youth in the middle twenties. He wore the wreck of a quilted overcoat and a baldish old astrakan cap ; his shoes were bound together with ropeyarns,



and he had a sack folded shawl-fashion about his neck. And for all that, he was as English as afternoon tea. Yes, afternoon tea : the same gentle and genteel amenity, the same small and taking formality that goes properly with the silver vessels and the pretty china. He was of the middle height, slender to the point of flimsiness, small and delicate in feature, and when he made way for a lady, or raised his hat, or performed any minor courtesy, the scenery of a drawing-room seemed to shape in the air about him.

The nun, if she was one, stood some seconds ere she spoke, surveying him with a swiftly narrowed interest.

"Bread?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes," he said, and drew forth the loaf to show her—a thing roughly globular, about the size of two large fists, mud-coloured and seemingly made of mud.

It had to suffice for himself and two others who awaited him, huddled in their fireless room above, but he knew he would not deny her a share if she needed it. He was seeking words in which to say so, when her gesture put the thing from her.

"Wait!" she said. "I'll tell you. Wait!"

She bent over the stair-rail, scouting with wary eyes for possible eavesdroppers. Above them the skylight was opaque with grime; from the hallway below the light of the open street-door rose languidly to show them to each other—he, undisguisable, of a personal quality as fixed and recognizable as his sex; she, tragically grotesque with her dirt-crusts face, her costume of stained khaki trousers and stinking sheepskin jacket, and all her effect of a thing brutally defaced and clumsily patched. They had the stairway to themselves for the moment; and across the great gulf of purpose and experience that parted them, she reached as it were a hand, crippled and defiled, yet tendering a gift. She spoke and he listened intently.

"There *is* such a place, then?"

He stared at her, thrilled yet incredulous, though she had given to him, in whispered snatches of speech, between glances up and down the well of the stairway, directions as detailed and precise as marching orders.

"Truly—truly!" she declared, still in a whisper, but with a manner of passionate assertion. "Would I tell you in jest? Bread—not like that loaf you have there; and potatoes; and

sometimes other things ! I have been there. Why do you doubt me ?”

“I don’t,” he answered ; “since you assure me,” he added. “I am awfully grateful. But I can’t help wondering why you have told it to me, of all people.”

Again she steadied her look upon him. She did not smile ; it was unthinkable that a smile should ever break upon the breathless tensiety of her face. But a sort of bitterness of mirth flickered in the smoulder of her eyes.

She shrugged. “Oh—just politeness !” she answered, and moved away. When he would have called thanks after her, she turned and laid an urgent finger on her lips.

“Then I will call on you to-morrow when I return,” he promised.

She nodded. “*Do svidania*—till we meet !” flatted back to him. Her boots, huge and wooden-soled, climped like hoofs on a pavement as she passed on ; he watched her to the hall and till she disappeared through the street-door. He never saw her again.

Godfrey Hope had been English tutor to the little grandson of Prince and Princess Orlovsky, living with his employers in their great old country house among the woods of Kaluga. The boy’s father and mother had fetched him away before the moment when Russia went rabid ; Hope had stayed on through the *jacquerie*, when the season of murder and rapine was opened and it was too late to get out of the country. He had smuggled his Prince and Princess to Moscow, with their jewellery and their worthless store of money hidden on their bodies ; he was still with them, finding them food as he could, interposing the little he had of strength and resource between them and the blessings of the Red Millennium, comforting them and drugging them to tranquillity with his little forms of deference and decorum of manners. They were old, and the times had multiplied their years—old and simple and helpless. They had never known the rough surfaces of life ; to desert them would be worse than brutal and cowardly—it would have been “caddish !”

“That damned house !”

He came to a standstill on the dark road, baffled ; all the afternoon he had limped and trudged upon his quest, and now, at last, he was ready to turn back, spent and empty-handed, to the familiar misery whence he had come. He began to do

so ; he was in the act of turning, when the house itself seemed suddenly to stand up in the darkness, actual and near, its thatched roof humped like a stooped back against the lesser gloom of the sky—as though it crouched there in hiding.

"It stands alone !" The nun had made a point of that ; and it seemed to him now, when he approached it and paused to take stock of it, that no other house had ever been so alone. It stood like a tombstone in a desert. Before it, the dreary road dragged its empty miles into the void of night ; the darkness crowded in upon it ; over it the sky was starless ; and to the north, where once Moscow had blazed and boiled, dimming the altar-candles of her thousand churches with gayer and more gaudy fires, there was again only the blackness of the night, dire with omens.

No light showed at any chink in sealed door and windows ; only the single chimney breathed forth a slim spire of smoke that poised straight as a rod, ghost-like and steady in the windless air. Save for an occasional handful of live charcoal in a dish, Godfrey Hope had not seen a fire for many weeks. It needed no more ; this was the place. He raised his hand and beat upon the door.

Through the thickness of its planks there came to him no stir of movement within. The door fell open without warning. The shape of a man filled its place, a mere bulk of lowered peering head and massive body silhouetted against a glow of light inside the cottage.

"*Shito takoe ?*" demanded the man. "What is it ?"

The sudden opening of the door took him by surprise. He had prepared for this moment a little battery of words, discreet and conciliatory, but now he baulked and stammered.

"*Prostitute*—forgive me ! I—er I—came—I was told that you—er——"

"*Nu !*" The man in the door broke in upon him. He had a deep voice that boomed with cracks of a shriller harshness in it. "It's food, of course ! You want to buy food, eh ?"

Impatience and angry contempt were in his tone. With his lighted hearth at his back and his stores of food, he had power ; the trumpet of his voice was a vaunt and a threat ; and Hope, trembling in the naked road before him, was afraid. For in Russia, to have power is to use it for cruelty.

"Yes," he faltered feebly. "I—er——"

"Of course!" boomed the other. "I knew it! Another cursed bourgeois come begging!"

He was slouched forward between the doorposts to peer at his visitor, and now he jerked upright. Godfrey Hope had a spasm of agony; it looked as though the man were going to close the door and the subject together.

In mere desperation he took a quick step forward.

"No!" he cried urgently. "No—I'm not. I'm—I'm an Englishman."

It was not what he had wanted to say, but in that stress he had to take words as they came to him; and even as he babbled them forth he was aware of their irrelevance. But the other man stopped short and bent to stare at him again.

"Englishman?" he repeated stupidly.

It was a moment of respite, at any rate; and Hope gathered himself to profit by it.

"Yes," he answered, "an Englishman; and I've brought some very fine things to show you if you'll let me come in for a minute. Just a minute!" he urged, with a sudden force, for while he had been standing still the cold had gnawed into him and he yearned to that glowing indoors he could see beyond the peasant's bulky shoulders. "Beautiful things they are; they belong to a prince. You'll want them when you see them!"

The mujik grunted his indifference to all fine and beautiful things. But his mind hung as on a hook upon the other matters.

"An Englishman!" he said again. "I thought they were all dead. Come inside and let us have a look at you!"

"*Sei chas*—immediately!" gasped Hope, and found, when he moved, that his legs were weak under him.

The odorous, breath-laden, heat-saturated air of the interior received him like a bath. The flat-topped brick stove, with tumbled bedding and bundles stowed upon it, stood with its door open; there was a lamp, too, upon a table; and at the table sat people—a woman, a young girl, and a small boy, who raised slow-witted faces to stare at him. He blinked and smiled at them dumbly, relaxed in a mere passivity of comfort.

The mujik who had admitted him explained him to the rest.

"An Englishman," he said; "come for food! Are you hungry, Englishman?"

There were bowls upon the table, which enriched the room's population of odours with the bouquet of *stchi*, that cabbage-soup which is to Russia what macaroni is to Italy, at once an institution and a symbol. Hope had evidently come upon the family at supper. The smell of the good, coarse, belly-filling stuff made him actually dizzy.

The mujik accompanied his words with a jerked thumb of contemptuous invitation towards the table. Seen in the light, he was a thick-set, blunt-faced man of middle age with a short brindled beard. There was a sneer on his lips as he waved the stranger to the food. It was nothing to him, this stuff that gave life and strength. He had fed other hungry gentlemen—yes, and famished ladies, too. He had seen them pick up crusts from the floor and tear them like dogs.

But it was an invitation of sorts, and to Godfrey Hope an invitation was like a cue to an actor. Desire was ravenous throughout all his body; but he smiled deprecatingly.

"That's awfully good of you," he said. "But I couldn't think of disturbing your supper."

"Eh?"

The big mujik did not understand. He frowned in an effort of thought, hanging midway between embarrassment and resentment. Then the explanation occurred to him. He nodded to his wife.

"I told you—he is an Englishman," he said, and sat down to his own steaming bowl.

There was a wooden stool near the open fire-door of the stove, and Hope, unwinding the sack from his neck, sat down upon it. He was weaker and more weary than he had known; in that balm of warmth, he could have dropped his head and slumbered forthwith; but, like the goads that kept the victim awake in the torture of *The Vigil*—a fine old medieval third-degree which the Extraordinary Commission has revived—those avid stares from the folk at the table, those eyes that gluttonized upon him, wrenched him back from the blessed torpor.

"Englishmen don't eat *stchi*!"

It was the girl. She made the statement as though she were giving the answer to a riddle. He had to look round, and, of course, he looked round smiling. She sat facing him, with the boy, a dirty urchin of about ten, at her side. She herself was, perhaps, fifteen, skinny armed, with disproportion-

tionately large knuckles to the bony hand that poised the wooden spoon before her ready-opened mouth. Her neck was meagre to the point of deformity, a mere stringy stalk for her head and for the sheer wonder of the perfect face, a long oval—the Madonna shape—that fronted him. She had fair hair with brown shades in it, like scorched flax; and the blue eyes under the broad and serene brow seemed to flicker and waver as though the light that shone through them were an unsteady one.

At Hope's smile she dropped her spoon and her loveliness broke into an idiot grin. From lips like rose-petals there jarred a cackle of witless mirth.

"Oh, *matushka*!" she giggled. "Look at the Englishman! He's smiling at me—he's smiling at me!"

"Hush!" The stolid mother put out a thick arm, took the girl by her thin shoulder and shook her gently. "Quiet, now! The Englishman will think you're a fool. Quiet!"

She rocked her to and fro for a few seconds, and the girl seemed to fall back to tranquillity under the movement. Her face settled again to its still, strange beauty—and she resumed her eating. The peasant woman let her arm fall; she turned to Hope and spoke for the first time since he had entered.

"We've got another daughter," she said.

Hope did not understand. "Ah, yes!" he answered vaguely. "Another daughter, have you?"

"Yes," said the woman, "we have. A clever one, too! Tell him, Pavel Ivan'itch; haven't we got a clever daughter?"

The mujik had finished his meal. He signified as much by leaning back on his bench and stretching himself voluptuously.

"Clever!" he said. "H'm!" His eye came round to Hope with a new arrogance; he had more to boast of than mere edible wealth. "*Uchitelnitsa*!" he said impressively. "She was a school-teacher. She had her certificates. That's what she was!"

"Had she really?" Hope, of course, showed the interest that was required of him. "That's splendid! But you said she *was* a teacher; isn't she one still?"

Husband and wife exchanged a swift look.

"Well—no!" said the mujik slowly. "When our revolution started she went to Moscow to work for the Soviet. She's there now."

Again that swift glance passed; Hope saw it, but could not guess its implication. He would have questioned further in pure amiability, but the mujik rose.

"Nul!" he said. "To business! Let us see what you've got."

He lounged forward, his flat hands stuck inside his leather belt. He was disdainful and arrogant still, but with an undernote of indulgence, a good Samaritan who despised his traveller. His big supper was doing its best for Hope.

"Yes," agreed Hope, "certainly; I will show you at once."

What he had to show was in a knotted handkerchief stowed inside his shirt. He had to unbutton and dig in his bosom for it. The woman was clearing away the supper-gear meanwhile; the idiot girl was rummaging in a far corner; the boy drew near, a thumb in his mouth, to watch.

"Now, this is a very wonderful thing," began Hope.

He laid the handkerchief upon the stool where he had been sitting and produced from it a gold watch, a big fob-distending packet of machinery which had come to Prince Orlovsky from his father. It *was* a wonderful thing, with the Orlovsky arms splendidly blazoned upon the case and embroidered in faded silk upon the old-fashioned watch-lining between the inner and outer cases, and its large, frank face, with the slim, brown figures raised delicately upon it in gold and the minute filigree ornamentation of its hands. It came of a day when watches were made to be heirlooms, to tick their faithful way from deathbed to deathbed of the passing generations. The hands that pointed the hour of Napoleon's fall pointed also that of the fall of Nicholas; its mortal owner carried an immortality in his pocket.

"You see?" said Godfrey Hope. "Gold, of course; and the workmanship—I tell you, there are kings who have not such a watch as that: And more! It is now seven o'clock. Listen!"

He pressed the repeater-catch. Little and sweet, true in tone and prompt, the bells responded. The maker had copied the famous chimes of some Flemish belfry or other, since silenced for good by shellfire; like spirit voices, still, small voices from the world of shades, the watch evoked them. The last of the Orlovsky line was starving; and thus it sang for his supper.

"Isn't it charming?" said Hope. "Have you ever known a watch like this before?"

He glanced up, full of assurance. The big mujik had his lips tight-closed upon a smile.

"I've got three of them," he answered. "I don't want any more. Yes!" he said, when Hope would have broken in. "Better ones than that! What else have you got?"

"Three of these!" gasped Hope. "But—you can't——"

"Huh!" The man laughed in a short, loud shout. He had the best of it this time and he was enjoying it. "I've had them crawling here at midnight and waiting in the road till I got up in the morning. I've seen them kneeling, like the beggars outside the churches, with their hands full of finer things than that old clock of yours. Kneeling and weeping—yes! Hi!" He called to his wife. "Let the *Anglichanin* see some of the pretty trash we've got! Bring it over here!"

"But, wait!" begged Hope. "I've got a ring, too; a very valuable ring."

It was the great cabochon emerald of the old princess; ponderous, priceless! A pope might have worn it without dishonour to St. Peter.

But the mujik waved it away.

"You just see *my* rings!" he jeered. "I'll show you rings!"

He did—strewed forth upon the seat of a deal bench, from wrappings of sweat-stained rags and cheap little boxes such as pedlars used to sell in the streets to tourists and children. Rings and brooches, bracelets and necklaces; toys of the dressing-table and the desk; gems, gold and silver; the debris of lives which had been stamped into the blood-mud of the revolution! The stove-fire and the lamplight set the litter of it a-sparkle. Like that which oozes between the floor-boards when the executioners come laughing and talking together from the slaughter-chamber—harlots and Chinamen and Russians who partake of the nature of both—all this had come trickling down to be at last the price of bread and to shine under the thatch of the bread-seller.

"Eh?" The mujik ploughed through the mass with a great spade-ended finger. "I'm a rich man, Englishman! Do you think I need toys like that? Why, if I——"

He broke off abruptly and stared. Hope thought it was at himself. They were all around him. He looked vaguely from side to side to see what was the matter, when a hand



caught him by the sleeve. Startled, he jerked around. The grave, lovely face of the idiot girl was at his shoulder, with its will-o'-the-wisp eyes.

She was tendering something to him with her other hand.

"For you!" she was saying. "For my Englishman!"

Hope was at a loss. She was trying to make him take something.

"Nice!" she crooned. "For you—nice!"

"Tanya!" The mother moved to take hold of her with a glare of defiance and challenge at Hope. The dirty urchin was sniggering. Then from the mujik came the spirit of an oath.

"Don't touch her! Don't touch her!" he cried to his wife. The woman came to a standstill. "She's taken a liking to him. Don't you see?"

He thrust the snuffing boy from his path and came swiftly forward.

"What has she got?" he said. "Never mind what it is! Take it, Englishman; she gives it to you. You mustn't refuse her! Take it; it's yours!"

"Er—" Hope hesitated. The lovely face of the idiot seemed to implore him gently; the brutal iron muzzle of the big mujik besought him. Even in the dull and heavy countenance of the woman there was something that dared him not to comply. He found the gift pressed into his hand—a little oblong cardboard box, such as once one bought with its contents anywhere in Russia for twenty kopecks, which had grown now unfamiliar.

"Oh—I couldn't!" The phrase was merely automatic, part of a code of politeness. But it might have been a curse; for the girl began, as it were, to wilt under it; her soul reeled visibly under the blow. He hastened to make amends in a silly patter of words. "It's *too* good of you! I can't thank you enough. Why, I haven't seen any for ever so long. But—are you sure you can spare all these?"

It was the mujik who now touched his arm.

"Quick!" he said. "Take one; let her see you! Quick—and you shall have some food to take away."

He bent and reached to the fire-door and drew forth in his iron fingers a piece of glowing wood. The idiot girl clapped her skeleton hands and her beautiful face was radiant and elfin with delight. Hope ran a thumbnail along the edge

of the little box, took from it one of the twenty cigarettes it contained and lighted it.

The girl squeaked with delight, and her mother took her. "My Englishman is smoking," she was chattering. "He smiled at me, and now he is smoking. Oh, *matushka*, isn't he pretty!"

The mujik laid back his fire-stick. "That's good, eh?" he said. Then in a lower voice: "You know—she's one of those that see things. She sees things that we can't see. We never thwart her. She's taken a fancy to you."

Hope was smiling. Facts were no longer true, and values had ceased to exist. The lunatic drama which is Russia had condensed itself into that single room. Like everyone else from the White to the Black Sea, his fate hung on the whim of a maniac. Who, by taking thought, could add an hour to the span of his hair-hung life? The delicious anæsthetic of the smoke worked within him; he was warm; food to take home had been promised him. He ceased to think, and let the wayward tide of events carry him as it list.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when, at last, the door of the cottage closed behind him, shutting him out to the dreary inhospitality of the road. The sack which he had worn over his neck was now slung over his shoulder. The idiot girl had hovered round him to the last, gambolling on lean ankles and ungainly feet, and her favour abode with him while the mujik stocked his sack. The gold watch and the historic ring had nobly proved their worth. The first had fetched something like fifteen pounds of bread, a bucketful of potatoes, and a slab of some whitish animal substance, the Russian name of which conveyed nothing to him, which was probably dripping. The ring—that was an heirloom, too; Captain Prince Orlovsky, of the Bodyguard, had given it to the Princess, then a Maid of Honour, upon her betrothal—had also been valuable. It had fetched eleven eggs and the remains of a joint of beef.

The night that had been filling the earth had now settled down upon it in a stagnation of windless dark. The cold that had bitten at him on his way out from Moscow now entered his body and inhabited him like a strong-rooted disease; and the sack, the sack of life that he bore, burdened him to the limit of his strength. There were eleven good footsore miles to go—the whole eleven that he had already

traversed. If the dawn saw him back at home, he would have done well ; later than that the streets of the city were not safe for men who carried sacks.

"Upsy-daisy !" said Godfrey Hope, cheerily, and slung his burden where he could best carry it. "Come on, grub ! It's probably worse than this in the trenches !"

Long hauls and short rests till shorter hauls and longer rests forced themselves upon him ! Twice, in that desert where solitude was the only safety, he saw human beings—and slid and scuffled down to the roadside ditch to let them pass. The first showed afar off a point of light that grew swiftly as it approached, split into two, and became the headlights of a motor-car. The thin ice in the ditch-bottom broke under Hope's hurried feet and the water stung him through his broken boots like an adder. The ruts of the road kept the speed of the car down ; with eyes peering over the rim of the ditch, Hope had a brief view of its occupants ; the leather-clad soldier-chauffeur at the wheel, and, in the lit interior of the body, the two passengers. One was plainly an underling, the profile of a rat, with all the rat's character of wary viciousness and mean acuteness, a face that receded in degenerate slopes from an eager carrion questing nose. Beside him, with a peak cap jammed down on his brow and a collar turned up about his ears, was the obvious master, with brows that bulged and overshadowed the eyes, high cheek-bones, pug-nose, and wide sensual mouth. Hope had never seen them before, but he knew who they were. Only the hierarchs of the charnelhouse went a-wheel ; their slaughterers walked. Here, upon who can tell what mission of horror, went Death and his pimp, Fear, weaving through the night their secret web, the go-betweens of tyranny and doom.

The others he saw an hour later. He was resting so that he heard their footsteps on the road and had time to get to the ditch before they could be aware of him. These had no lights ; he saw them only as vague shapes moving in the dark, one tall, the other no taller than himself. They trudged painfully upon their way, talking in brief snatches as they went. It was not till they were quite close that he could hear them clearly. At the first words that he distinguished he moved in a start of uncontrollable surprise.

The taller figure was talking in the low and hoarse voice of a man with a heavy cold on his chest.

"We can't miss it," he said. "It stands alone. There are no other houses near it."

"Ye-es!" The voice of the smaller wanderer was that of a woman. "But if they shouldn't be willing to sell, after all! I am so afraid we'll get nothing."

"Hush, dear," said the man. "They're just peasants, you know. They probably never saw a gold watch in their lives before."

And so talking, they passed on with their gold watch, their mortal need, and their vain hope, seeking the house of the idiot girl, the house that stood alone.

## II

There used to be a painting by Verestchagin showing horses of Napoleon's cavalry stabled in that fantastic, Coney-Island-looking church which faces the length of the Red Square in Moscow. The horses and their gear and their litter were crowded into the labyrinth of little, dark, wooden-pillared chapels; the troopers lounged among them; and the church, St. Basil's, is there to this day to show that they did it no particular harm. There is an historical affinity, after all, between an altar and a manger. Verestchagin is dead; his place is vacant for the painter who shall be moved to set on canvas Moscow itself, the White-walled, the Sacred City, now that those who held it holy have got it to themselves. Trotsky and his cattle in the Kremlin, for instance; the shrine of the Iberian Virgin, where once the pickpockets worked all the twenty-four hours round among the thronged devotees, now violated and despoiled; the palaces, old and new, where the Kommissars and their women and their brigands have hived themselves together! And the dirt and the misery and the failure of it all—a revolution that triumphs in rags and scrapes the gutters for crusts to celebrate with!

Just behind the splendours of the Tverskaya, and close to the buildings of the Old University, was the house that Riraldescu, the great Rumanian millionaire, had built for himself. He had other houses scattered here and there about Europe; he moved from city to city ceaselessly, taking each in its brief yearly season of perfect bloom, and died soon after the armistice of ptomaine poisoning contracted in a

dining-car. It was a marble-fronted building upon the model of a Venetian palace, with a loggia of slender pillars fronting the street, a beautiful arched doorway, and a paved courtyard in the middle. He had been a collector of stained glass, among many other things; the best of it was framed in the eight tall windows that fronted the street above the loggia. At night, when the great room within was lighted up, they shone forth to the filth and darkness of the crippled city with a ripe and tender glow, as though their mild and shining saints would signal: "This is the house of a Kommissar; walk wide of it!"

It was not yet dawn, but the grey forerunner of day was in the east and the lights in the windows were extinguished, when the sentry huddled in the loggia was aware of one who approached. He would have paid little attention, for malefactors never came this way, if the passer-by had simply passed by. The sentry poked his head forth between the pillars to look at him.

The man was behaving strangely. He seemed to have a large bundle of some kind, and suddenly he let it down upon the pavement, fell on his knees beside it and bowed his head upon it. The sentry disengaged an ear from under his cap and became alert. The man was praying! Presently he saw him rise, struggle with his burden, and stagger forward with it; and all the time there came from him a rising and falling mutter of speech. The sentry had had a pious upbringing, but he recognized no word of any prayer that he knew. The man was abreast of him when down went the burden and its bearer with it, groaning his unceasing prayer.

"Hi!" called the sentry then. "What's all this?"

The other's head was resting on the sack. He did not raise it at the summons. He was still praying, with no word that was intelligible. The sentry hesitated, then stepped from the foot-high terrace of the loggia and shook the man smartly by the shoulder.

"Now then!" he demanded. "What do you mean by it?"

The crouching man lifted his heavy head, and in the gloom his thin and beardless face showed white like a shine of water. And still he prayed.

"Long—long way—to—Tipp'rary!" he was saying, feebly.

The sentry released the limp shoulder. "*Inostranets!*" he

said with disgust. "A foreigner!" He gave the foreigner a Russian kick. "Stay there, you!"

His second or third shout fetched out the sergeant of the guard and a comrade with a lantern.

"A foreigner," explained the sentry. "Flops down and prays over that bundle; can't understand a word he says."

"Prays, eh?" The sergeant showed interest. "Better see what he's praying about. Open the bundle, one of you!"

When the sentry released him, Hope's head had fallen forward once more. His "praying" had ceased at last. Physically a weakling to begin with, miserably under-nourished for a long period, he had stretched his endurance to the uttermost. He had covered the last miles in a delirium, hunted along from collapse to collapse only by an unflagging will. While the soldiers stood around and talked above him, he slept with his face flattened on the sack.

But when the sentry bent to pull the sack away, his hands were yet clenched upon it and hung on.

"Well," said the sergeant, "there's a vicious devil for you! No, don't bayonet him; we may want him."

His skilful foot—he had been a gendarme in the old days—kicked the outworn body aside. It lay, writhed for a second, and was still again. Hope was asleep once more. They opened the sack, up-ended it, and spilled its contents forth upon the pavement. The lantern was lowered to illuminate them.

Like the jewels on the mujik's bench they lay heaped on the dirty pavement! The bread, the meat, the smashed eggs, and the rest, bought with the insignia of pride and honour, and carried hither with what bitter labour!

The sergeant grimaced and scratched his chin. "H'm!" he reflected. "A food speculator! Better take three of those loaves and the meat—and the dripping, of course—to the guardroom. That'll be our share; the rest is evidence. Put the prisoner in the cell. Tickle his tail with the bayonet if he's inclined to be lazy."

Rinaldescu's Venetian palace had its Russian dungeon, a large, arched storeroom opening from the cloisters of the court. It was closed with massive double doors artistically studded with copper nails; over them a curved transom of ground glass gave a little light when there was any to give.

Hope was widely enough awake when the wicket in the big doors was set ajar for him; he tumbled through it just not quickly enough to escape a final humorous prod from the long, three-edged bayonet that had awakened him. The wicket slammed behind him; the lantern was hung up in some place that let the dregs of its light leak through the transom; and he fell on his face on the stone floor, sobbing. Not weeping; just sobbing! For a while he could do nothing else.

There were others in the place, the nightly bag of the Kommissar's huntsmen. When he had come to mastery of himself he was aware of them stirring and breathing in the gloom. They seemed to be huddled together upon the ground in a far corner of the place.

Then one of them spoke.

"Have they hurt you *tovarish*—comrade?"

It was a woman's voice, husky like an old drunkard's, with cracks and quavers in it.

"Yes," said Hope. "They—they drove me in with a bayonet. I seem to be bleeding."

The stickiness and warmth of it were spreading under his clothes. His side hurt him, too, where the sergeant had kicked him. All these disasters had happened to him while his senses were yet clogged with weariness and slumber. He was like a man who returns to consciousness, sick and racked with pain, after an operation.

"Come over here," said the woman; "come close and you'll be the warmer. There are three of us here."

Hope stifled a groan as he wrenched himself up; there was not a cell of his body that was not the home of an ache. "Thank you," he managed to say; "that's very kind of you."

He tottered across and sank down into the little communion of surely the wretchedest people on earth.

"You're a foreigner, aren't you?" asked the woman. "Well," she sighed, "it doesn't matter nowadays. You'd be better off if you were a Russian. Look at us three! That young man stole a pair of boots. This old fellow next to me—why, he hasn't done anything. He's been a church-door beggar all his life, and now his leprosy has gone to his eyes and he's blind. What's the sense of executing a poor old fellow like him? And me! What harm have I done?"

She seemed to await an answer. "None, I am sure," said Hope.

"They told us—they told us in so many words—that we girls needn't have 'yellow tickets' any more. And then they arrest us!"

"Yellow tickets" were the permits issued by the police to women to practice as courtesans in Moscow.

"Do they expect us to sit still and starve?" she demanded.

Hope sighed. He was leaning against her, his shoulder to hers; she had had the blind leper on her other side; and the stench of them made a faint illusion of indoor warmth. He had a vision of the old Prince and Princess in their fireless chamber, awaiting his return, dying by hours, believing at the last that he had deserted them, taking with him the ring and the watch. And they would not blame him; often they had urged him to go and save himself.

"I think they do," he said to the woman. "But as we haven't, what do you think they'll do to us?"

She shook her head and sighed in her turn.

"Who can tell?" she answered. "There's nothing to go by. The Kommissar is in a hurry, perhaps, or his corns are hurting him. The death-warrants are before him, all signed; he has only to scribble your name and you are disposed of. Then they take you out to wait for the dead-cart, and when it comes they knock you on the head and throw you in. That's if they don't save you up for the cellars."

"Ah!" said Hope. He had heard of the cellars and had not believed in them. "The cellars, eh? You don't seem to be terribly afraid of them, though!"

"That's the only thing I am afraid of," she answered. "If it's men I have to deal with, I'll be all right. But these damned women and their cellar-parties, and everybody drunk but the poor devil who's dragged in to furnish the fun—that scares me. Yes, you may think they'll be careful what they do to a foreigner; and perhaps they would be; but not if some little darling with a baby-face comes smiling up and says 'Oh, is that an Englishman. Do let us see how an Englishman dies!' Then—the cellar-party! You'll hear the music from the dance upstairs, and presently they'll come down to you, all giggling and whispering. There'll be drinks—you'll probably get some—and they'll chat with you. You'll never tell anyone what they say to you. Oh, I've heard it all from



people who've been there; it's true as gospel. And then, the one who's won you—you'll see her, with the pistol in her hand; and if she's a good shot you'll never see anything else at all. And that's what the cellars mean!"

"I see," said Hope, wearily.

"Do you?" The woman spoke sharply. "Well, I don't. What's the matter with people, anyhow—tossing death about like confetti? The Tsar is executed and the people are in power; what more do they want? Why can't they leave us in peace?"

"I don't know," answered Hope. "They're like a boy with a knife, I suppose. They must have something to cut."

To neither of them did it suggest itself that all the error and the wrong, the crime and the failure, were rooted in the heart and ran in the blood of the people. God had been ceremonially exorcized; the Tsar, with his sick child in his arms, had been murdered; the idle rich, the busy rich, the bureaucrats, the bourgeois, and the intelligentsia, all that hampered the development of the much-advertised soul of the Russian, had been stamped out. There remained only that sterling manhood which starves by millions in the granary of Europe and freezes to death in a country of forests. And their sole contribution to civilization and the cause of mankind was the hysteric philosophy, the madhouse economics, and the monkey-morality of Bolshevism.

"Huh!" The woman grunted and was still. The old leper and the thief had spoken not at all. Hope, despite his wounds and his many pains, found himself drowsy again. His head drooped and presently came to rest upon the shoulder of the prostitute. Daylight crawled up and showed grimy and stale upon the stones of their prison; and the four of them, expecting and dreading death, slumbered together as though sleep were not itself the better and more blessed part of death.

### III

Dimitri Pavlovitch Botkin had been a clerk in the Moscow showrooms of a German firm of automobile manufacturers which specialized in a 100-horse-power Juggernaut for the gilded-youth market. Daily before his eyes they had lounged

and postured, the exquisite young men of wealth or debts, with their English clothes and their piquant companions, their slang, and their manners. He himself was the son of a village schoolmaster who had done his poor best for him in the way of education ; but his university was the showroom with the two great shining cars in the middle of the floor, his professors the spendthrifts and millionaires who walked round them, criticized them, and sometimes bought them. By 1914, when the army sucked him in and rolled him in the crudities of the Polish front, he needed only money to demonstrate himself as accomplished and showy a waster as the most eminent of the gilded ones.

In 1917 he had shot in cold blood the captain of his company with his own hand and went into politics.

He was a tallish man of about thirty, long-limbed and herring-gutted, with a long face, womanishly smooth, sleek black hair, and a comic little smudge of black moustache. He had a well-selected repertoire of noticeable attitudes and an impressive languor of speech ; the cant-word "comrade" in his mouth sounded like a witticism. He considered it characteristic of his taste and personality that he had selected the Rinaldescu palace for his headquarters as Kommissar, when he might have taken the Hôtel de Paris.

It was towards eleven o'clock in the morning when he came into the great room with the stained glass windows, drooping at the shoulders, a hand sunk in a trousers pocket, a cigarette gummed to his lip. People were there already awaiting him.

"Hallo, everybody !" he greeted them languidly. "Hope you're all feeling as rotten as I am. That you, Sashenka ?"

The girl who sat in the narrow recess of one of the tall windows lifted her head so that her profile had its dull-glowing colours for a background. She wore furs, and boots that rose to the hem of her short skirt. She nodded to him carelessly.

Botkin let himself down in the chair behind the wide desk. His secretary, a fat, bald little man in spectacles, trotted to his side with papers.

The dandy Kommissar leaned back from the documents.

"My dear fellow," he said protestingly, "you're a very nice chap, but don't try me too far. Is there anything in all these papers that I really must see ? Statistics ? Damn the

statistics ! Personal memo ? You can leave that. Report of proceedings—file it. Wireless news ? Yes ; I'll look at that. Anything else ?”

“These communications must be acknowledged. But I can do that !”

“Of course you can, my dear old chap. That's what I keep you for. Off you trot and do it !”

The girl in the window-recess looked up again. “Why don't you do some work sometimes ?” she said. “You're only an ornament ; little Postnik there is the real Kommissar. He does everything.”

“Ye-es,” drawled Botkin, and Postnik, the secretary, quaked as a sleepy eye rested on him, for the Kommissar had his Neronic moments. “But don't encourage him to think so. It wouldn't be good for him. You can go, Postnik.”

“Yes, Excellency !” truckled Postnik, and vanished thankfully.

The sergeant and commander-in-chief of the Kommissar's army of twelve strode across the parquet, big and soldierly.

“Four prisoners, comrade !” he announced. “Shall I bring them in ?”

“Prisoners, eh ? In that case we'd better have Postnik back,” said the Kommissar. He pressed a bell-button. “All right, sergeant ; fetch 'em in.”

They had been given a glass of tea apiece, but nothing to eat. They came in all their distress and desrepair, escorted by two soldiers with fixed bayonets, up Rinaldescu's marble staircase with its wonderful bronze rail, past his world-famous Venus Anadyomene, through the splendour of the ante-room, and so into the presence. The thief went first, a burly-bodied, half-human creature, with an inch-wide forehead and no chin. After him limped Hope ; and last came the woman with the old blind leper tottering beside her, hanging to her arm. The group of them dragged their way across the shining floor till they stood some ten paces from the desk.

“The prisoners,” reported the sergeant.

The Kommissar, leaning back in his chair, cigarette in his mouth, one knee raised to rest against the edge of the desk, surveyed them with a supercilious weariness. The girl in the window rose and came and leaned her hip against the corner of his desk to look at them,

"Really, sergeant!" said the Kommissar. "You do collect the most extraordinary specimens. What on earth is that old creature there?"

He gestured with his head towards the old beggar. For years the old man had lived on the utter horror of his appearance; it had been his working capital. But capitalism is a crime under the Bolsheviks.

"Public nuisance," replied the sergeant promptly. "Squats in doorways to beg and refuses to move on. Professional beggar; blind; a leper; and——"

"Eh?"

The Kommissar jerked upright in his chair and the cigarette fell from his lip.

"A—a leper! What the devil do you mean by bringing a leper in here, damn you? Take him out—d'you hear?—right outside, clear of the place? What shall you do with him? Kill him, you stupid fool—and don't leave the carcass lying about! Postnik will give you the warrant afterwards. Hurry now!"

One of the soldiers swung the old man round and headed him for the door. It is probable that he understood nothing of what was passing. He went out with his armed companion and executioner and they heard his shuffling descent of the stairs, his cautious move from step to step lest in his blindness he should fall and break his neck.

"If ever you bring a leper in here again, sergeant," said the Kommissar, "I'll deal with you in a way that'll startle you. Remember that!"

"Very good, comrade," answered the sergeant.

The Kommissar lit a fresh cigarette. "Well, who's the woman?"

The street-walker stepped forward and spoke her name, gazing with eyes of alarm from the man to the girl and back again. She was a thick-set blowsy creature, with a fat face that one would have called honest. The charge against her was some complicated matter of registration.

"H'm!" The Kommissar nodded. "Got anything to say about it?" he asked of the woman.

She moistened her lips with her tongue.

"I didn't understand about the papers," she answered in her hoarse voice. "The laws keep changing so; nobody understands. I haven't done anything to be killed for!"

The Kommissar smiled and exchanged an amused glance with the girl beside the desk.

"You think you can't be spared?" he suggested.

"In the old days they used to fine us," went on the woman. "At the worst, it was a week in jail. It isn't as if I'd done any harm. What's the use of killing a poor girl for what she can't help? The soldiers have taken all my money; isn't that punishment enough?"

Again the Kommissar smiled. He was enjoying this, the rapier-play of what he esteemed to be his wit against the clumsy bludgeon of the woman's desperate defence.

"It isn't a question of punishment," he drawled. "You don't understand the law and therefore can't obey it. So the question is whether we're not better off without you."

She needed a moment to understand this.

"I *can* obey it!" she cried. "Tell me what it is and I'll obey it, I swear!"

"We-ell!" He affected to deliberate. The victim, her face rigid in a grimace of suspense, hardly breathed. The Kommissar turned to the girl. "What do you think, Sashenka? Ought we——"

The wretched woman awaiting judgment uttered a cry. She fell on her knees and stretched her arms to him in a supplication.

"For God's sake, Excellency! Not her—not her; don't ask her! You are the judge, Excellency. *You* can be merciful! Don't listen to her, Excellency; she'll only tell you to send me to be shot. Excellency— Excellency——"

Her voice choked to a standstill; she remained kneeling, gulping painfully.

"Set a woman to catch a woman, Sashenka," remarked the Kommissar. "How you dear things know each other!"

The girl wrinkled her nose disgustedly. "That isn't a woman," she said. "It's only another sort of leper!"

"I prefer this sort to the other," said the Kommissar. "Still, I'd better write her a prescription for her trouble." He picked up a pen and wrote; a rubber-stamp completed the death-warrant. "For all her troubles, in fact," he added. "Now, who's next?"

The thief showed no sport; he lasted just thirty seconds and then the pen and the rubber-stamp disposed of him.

"And this fellow?"

Hope stood forward. There was an oval mirror on the wall behind the Kommissar, and his own face looked back at him, white through its dirt, with blue shadows in the hollows and unfamiliar strained lines. He knew what he had to encounter. Here was no justice, no law, not even the sober pursuit of any particular policy; only the freakish and vanity-eaten personality of the Kommissar. He made a little bow.

"Godfrey Hope," he announced himself. "An Englishman."

"Ah!" It was a soft exclamation of interest from the girl. She hoisted herself so that she half-sat upon the corner of the desk, with one foot swinging and the other upon the ground. The little secretary, standing behind his master's shoulder, became alert behind his spectacles.

The Kommissar crossed his knees elegantly and prepared to make use of his opportunities. The sergeant declaimed the charge.

"Well, Mister Hope"—the Kommissar used the English word—"this is very unfortunate. I hope you will be able to explain satisfactorily. Perhaps you would like to sit down?"

"You are very kind," said Hope. "I *am* rather tired."

It was one of the Kommissar's little tricks. He often invited a victim to hear his doom sitting down. But always they protested that they were only too willing to remain standing.

"Give the gentleman a chair, sergeant! And take those other two prisoners out."

Hope seated himself thankfully on one of Rinaldescu's tapestry-covered chairs. He found nothing either sinister or surprising in the Kommissar's civility; he was always civil himself.

The woman and the thief went out and with them went the bayonet and the papers. It is possible that, owing to the Kommissar's manner of doing business, they did not know whither they were going.

"Now, Mister Hope," said the Kommissar, "what are you, an Englishman, doing in Moscow?"

Hope shrugged and smiled faintly.

"Starving!" he answered.

He had intended nothing in the nature of a repartee, but the girl suddenly laughed.

"Really?" The Kommissar took his cigarette from his lips with a slow flourish, making a gesture of the movement. "But it would certainly seem that you know where to get supplies. There is enough in that sack for half a dozen people."

He waved to the sack. That *corpus delicti*, skimmed of its cream by the sergeant, had been brought into the room and lay, obscene and incongruous, upon the polished parquet, with a cabbage in its mouth.

Hope shook his head. "For three people," he replied. "Myself and two others—to last as long as possible. It would have saved their lives."

"Yes!" The Kommissar waved the cigarette again. "No doubt your intentions were excellent. But you must have been aware that this illicit traffic is strictly forbidden, and that by engaging in it you incurred a certain penalty?"

He watched his prisoner under lowered lids. The fellow was altogether too much at his ease. He liked to see them writhe and gasp.

"Oh, yes!" answered Hope. "Oh, yes! I knew that, of course."

The girl smiled and, still smiling, turned and looked at the Kommissar.

"Ah! You did. Then I must ask you to tell me from whom you bought those provisions."

"From whom I bought them!" Hope's eyebrows rose in an expression of amused surprise. The Kommissar marked it; gentlemen in the showroom had looked at him like that sometimes, as though he and his vices and his virtues, his life or death, his pain or pleasure were dim, far-off, trivial things. He reddened, and the avid beast within him raised its terrible head.

"Yes," he said shortly. "You heard me correctly. Who sold you this food?"

Hope's faint smile showed again. "Sorry," he said. "I can't say anything about that."

"You mean you refuse to answer willingly? Because, Mister Hope"—he paused and released a mouthful of smoke—"because you will be obliged to answer, willingly or not."

Hope was silent, but the look which infuriated the Kommissar still lingered on his face. The official's soul clamoured for ugly words that should set a gape of terror in its place.

"Come, Mister Hope; your feelings and the names you call them by—honour, loyalty, and so forth—we can take for granted. But they are not things which can be allowed to stand in the way of our administration. You must see that. And since sooner or later you will answer—Oh, I assure you that you will answer!—stronger men than you have refused to answer, and yet—" He paused and shrugged. "They babbled like delirious women in the end," he said slowly.

Hope pursed his lips thoughtfully. The Kommissar and the girl were both watching him, the latter leaning forward, propped on a closed hand, with a look as of gay excitement. But though he seemed to ponder, he was actually not thinking at all. There was nothing to think about. He only knew one way of behaving, a very simple and obvious way. It is ignorance such as his that sends men to the stake.

"You mean"—he began, and hesitated as at an indecent word—"you mean—torture?" The Kommissar continued to gaze at him, all his sallow face charged with deadly meaning. But he answered nothing. "Yes," said Hope, "I heard torture was being used. But I didn't believe it."

Still they were silent. They knew, *they* knew how to let a man's own thoughts do their work for them. The word had been skirted, shied at, dodged, till the victim had been forced to speak it—"torture"—and now would come the visions it would evoke, the frail flesh and the remorseless irons, the searching, crushing and needless pain.

He lifted his face and returned their stare.

"No!" he said. "Sorry, but I can't tell you anything."

"Then," began the Kommissar, slowly, while his full red lips widened to a smile, "in that case——"

"*Chort!*" The girl's sharp oath interrupted him. She had swung round to look at him. "Don't be a damned fool, Botkin! You've played and lost. And you know already where he got the grub. You're only play-acting!"

The Kommissar's careful outwardness dissolved in mere human anger. "Look here, Sashenka——"

"Bosh!" she snapped. "Don't try that on with me. You aren't big enough." The movement of her shoulder as she turned it on him was like the slamming of a door in his face.

"So you won't tell where you got it, Englishman? Well, shall I tell *you*!"



She wore a fur cap that hid her hair ; under the brim of it her small face, cream-pale, was impish and piquante, a girl-Puck, a -flutter in the dark forest of the midwinter-night's fever-dream. Hope had seen her so far only as a part of the great splendid room, a living bibelot among the other treasures of the place.

He turned to her with just the right little start of prompt attention and half-smile of pleased interest. He did these things as he breathed, automatically. Actually he was surveying her with what acuteness he could muster. There was something in her—he laboured to identify it and failed—which seemed familiar.

"Shall I tell *you*," she repeated, "where you bought all that muck ?"

"If you like," answered Hope. "But you mustn't ask me afterwards if you're right."

She smiled at that. The Kommissar was at work with his pen and his rubber stamp ; the little secretary, timidly insistent, was bending beside him, whispering and pointing with a black-nailed finger to something in a typewritten paper which he had. Neither Hope nor the girl looked at them.

"Listen !" said the girl. "A little thatched house, all by itself ! A big mujik with a beard, a nice fat wife, a little boy, and a queer daughter ! What do you say to that ?"

"Nothing," answered Hope, "except that it sounds very nice."

She laughed. "That is the place you would not betray. But we know all about that place. It has nothing to fear ; a very strong arm protects it. Look !" she cried, clenched her fist and went through the motions of flexing her biceps and feeling the muscle. "If one straw of its thatch were harmed, I'd set fire to Moscow."

He recognized it then, the thing in her which he had sought to identify. It was her eyes of clear pale blue and the dancing precarious light of them, like windows of a draughty room in which a fire leaps and sinks. Not fifteen hours ago he had seen such eyes in the face of the idiot girl. After all, it was not such a crashing coincidence, since she "worked for the Soviet" in Moscow. She was the *uchitelnitsa*, the clever daughter ; she made safe the traffic of the house that stood alone—a pretty little bird of prey, a pet carrion-canary in the ghoulish aviary of the Kommissars, a figure of note in the

dances and the "cellar-parties." Lucky, indeed, was the father of such a daughter, now that women were going so cheaply!

"Well?" she demanded.

He smiled and shook his head. "No use asking me," he replied.

There was argument between the Kommissar and the secretary.

"I only call your attention to it, Excellency," the latter was saying, sweating visibly. "It is a positive order and we acknowledged receipt of it. I shall be blamed, Excellency."

The Kommissar looked at him with a feral side-long droop of the month.

"Yes," he answered. "You will!"

"B-but, Excellency, it is not my fault." The secretary cast despairing eyes around him. "The young lady is witness that I begged your Excellency——"

"Shut up!" interrupted Botkin savagely.

But the girl had heard. She turned sharply.

"I'm a witness all right," she said briskly. "What's he trying to do to you, Postnik? What's the game, Botkin?"

The Kommissar snarled. "You mind your own business if you've got any."

She gave him a look that calmed him as a splash of cold water calms an hysteric.

"Right!" she said. "I will. You're a rotten brute, Botkin, and you've lasted too long in this job. That's the business I'm going to mind to-day."

She slipped down from the desk, and, still looking at him, began to draw on her gauntlets.

"Don't be silly!" The Kommissar moved awkwardly in his chair. He knew the kind of thing she could do to him; he had seen it done to others. She had only to find or create the right moment and the right mood to speak, pungently and adroitly, the needed poisoned words—smile them, perhaps, across the rim of a champagne glass—to this bloated potentate or that; and the thing was done. The head of a Kommissar on a charge was cheap enough.

"Sit down again," he urged. "It's nothing really—simply something I ought to have known before which this fool springs on me at the last moment like this. Sit down, Sashenka."

She curled a scornful lip. "That's right—blame Postnik!"

"Damn Postnik!" cried the Kommissar.

It was an order from Lenin himself, signed with his own august hand, that all cases involving foreigners of certain specified nationalities were to be referred to the Kommissar for Foreign Affairs. Litvinoff, the Bolshevik emissary, was not finding himself very comfortable in London; people whose friends or relatives had been murdered by his employers were narrow enough to be stand-offish; and even in Government offices where broader views might have been expected, there was no real cordiality. France, too, was stubbornly obtuse to the Red evangel; and an execution volley in Moscow echoed and re-echoed from seaboard to seaboard of the United States. The order, therefore, was peremptory.

"Now, Mister Hope, listen to me." Hope sat up and obeyed. "I cannot tell you whether you are fortunate or otherwise in that your case is to be decided elsewhere. As a foreigner, you are remitted to the Commission for Foreign Affairs. I can't, however, advise you to found hopes on that. Your crime is a serious one and is becoming much too common. You will, therefore, go to prison until your fate is decided."

Hope rose from his chair and bowed gravely.

"Meantime I have a request to make," he said.

The Kommissar frowned irritably. The prisoner's manner was impressing him and he resented it.

"You are not in a position to make requests," he said shortly.

"But this is not an official matter," persisted Hope. "It's a personal thing, as between gentlemen. You can't possibly refuse it."

The girl made some queer little noise, between a word and a laugh. The Kommissar compressed his lips.

"Make your request, then," he said.

Hope bowed again, gravely as before.

"The people with whom I have been living were expecting me back before daylight. They will be in great fear and distress. They are very old and feeble, and I should be deeply grateful if you would cause them to be told what has happened to me."

"H'h!" The Kommissar slowly lit another cigarette and

sat for some moments in thought. "Who are these people?" he asked.

"The Prince and Princess Orlovsky," replied Hope, and gave the address.

The Kommissar nodded and noted it on a pad.

"You lived with them?" Hope nodded. "In what capacity? *Sluga*, perhaps? A flunkey?"

Hope smiled pleasantly. "Something of the kind," he agreed. "I was a tutor in the family."

"A tutor!" repeated the Kommissar. A very royal contempt was in his tone. He had suspected the fellow of being a man of position, an aristocrat, one of those who lounge into show-rooms to look at cars. As to tutors, he knew all about them; his father, one recalls, was a village schoolmaster.

But the girl repeated the word, too. "*Uchitel!*" she cried. "A teacher—you too!" She clapped her hands and her laughter rang in the great room. "Oh, I must certainly ask the people who sold you the food about you. This is wonderful!"

The Kommissar waited grimly for her to finish.

"Well," he said to Hope, "the people you speak of shall be informed of your arrest. You have nothing else to say? Good! Sergeant—remove the prisoner."

"Good morning," said Hope politely, as the sergeant took him by the arm.

The Kommissar grunted involuntarily. He had not the temper to play his own game to the end.

But the girl laughed once more.

"*Do svidania!*" she called. "Till we meet again!"

Hope smiled mechanically. And while he smiled he wondered when the next meeting would take place—at what hour and in what cellar!

#### IV

There were prisons enough in Moscow in the days of the Tsar, and, as prisons go, they were not very terrible. The prisoners gambled a good deal; they bought liquor and tobacco from the warders; and a few, like Dostoievsky and Gorky, made a profit out of the record of their experiences. But in the year 1918 there was a shortage, not only of food and

fuel, of boots and medicines, but of jails. They had to be extemporized all over the city like hospitals in war time, wherever there were stout walls and strong locks. Churches, private houses, wine cellars and stables were pressed into service; people passing along any shabby, unclean street might hear suddenly the outbreak of singing, men's and women's voices in chorus, that would tell them that a jail was close by. For only the prisoners in those days were free enough to sing.

The prison to which Godfrey Hope was marched, a single armed man trudging at his heels to guard him, had been a German boarding-house. A tortuously-carved hat rack and an oleograph of a girl with flaxen pigtales still remained in the entrance, where a fat old man, in a mixture of workman's clothes and soldier's uniform, struggled, grunting, from a broken rocking chair to receive him into custody.

"*Anglichanin?*" he repeated, when the escort had gone through the forms of handing over his prisoner. "Is he rich?"

"Him!" The soldier sneered. "Look at him. I've been through every pocket he's got, and there wasn't a kopeck. I'll bet he's starving at this moment."

He grunted and went off. The old man hobbled close to Hope and felt him up and down in the pretence of a search. He might have been anything between sixty and eighty, a shameful old bladder of a creature, useless and horrible as a snake, who yet found the means to be fat. Some tangled string in the confusion of the times had been pulled, and here he was in office. Perhaps he, too, had a pretty and clever daughter.

His patting, seeking hands found nothing, of course.

"Bad—bad!" he groaned. "It is bad to be without money in these days. Me—I have only my rations to keep me alive; a little bread, a little soup, a little tea; and I am an old, old man. Those soldiers, they are thieves. They robbed you, eh?"

"They took all I had," answered Hope truthfully.

"Ah, the brigands! And you heard what that liar said? But you have friends who will get permission to visit you—yes? A gentleman can be very comfortable here if his friends are good to him."

"Perhaps," said Hope vaguely.

"Of course," said the jailer. "And when you want something—why, here I am! Now I will call a man to take you to your quarters."

There was a suite of rooms on the second floor, cut off from the rest of the house by a single door with numbers painted upon it. A short corridor was within, with windows opening on the street on one side and two small rooms on the other; at the farther end was a single large room. Some debris of furniture remained in it, cheap wooden stuff that retained in its decay and wreckage the unmistakable boarding-house character.

"Go in," said the jailer who had brought him up the stairs, standing at the opened door.

The place was full of voices, but not noisy. Folk were talking in all three of the rooms in ordinary voices, though there was no one in the corridor. Hope was aware that he expected something different, a cowed silence broken by groans, perhaps, or an uproar of desperation. He hesitated with a sense of trespass.

"Go in, will you!" ordered the jailer. "You can squat down where you like. No reserved places here!"

He gave Hope a shove and thrust him into the short passage. The door slammed at his back—and its bolts and bars jangled into place.

Those in the rooms heard it, for talk halted. Folk appeared in the doorways to look at him. From the large room at the end a tall man came towards him.

"A new prisoner?" he asked pleasantly.

He had a thin shaven face, with the remains of deep weather-stain upon the high cheeks, and thick grey hair. He was dressed in the worn uniform of an infantry officer, with the badges removed.

"Yes," said Hope. "I was arrested this morning."

The other nodded. "An Englishman, aren't you? I noticed your accent. Better come into this farthest room. They called rather a long list of us yesterday, and we've got more room than the others. Come along!"

Hope followed him. The large room extended through the front wing of the house and had windows both upon the street and the courtyard. There were perhaps twenty people in it, men and women both, lying on their bundles by the walls or seated in groups.

"By the way, my name is Volkov," said the man who had greeted him. Hope spoke his own name, pronouncing it, according to the local convention, "Gope." For there is no "H" in Russian and "G" does duty for it. The late Kaiser was called "Wilhelm Gogenzollern."

"Well," said the officer, "I'll postpone the introductions. You look awfully tired. When did you have a meal last?"

Hope shook his head. "Meals haven't come my way lately," he said. "I know I had nothing yesterday. The day before I had some bread. But I'm all right, really. I suppose they sometimes feed one here, don't they?"

Volkov took his arm. "Come and sit down," he said. "We needn't wait for the ration. God be thanked, our jailer is bribable. As Trubin said, it's only the bad Bolsheviks who make life possible in Russia."

He found Hope a seat on the floor against the wall and gave him a folded uniform greatcoat to sit on. A girl sitting a few feet away turned to the newcomer. Volkov spoke to her.

"Here's an Englishman for you, Elena! Look after him, will you, while I get him some food."

"An Englishman?" repeated the girl and hitched nearer.

"Yes," said Volkov. "One of those who Trubin called 'the envy of the world and the despair of Heaven.' Just talk to him while I knock for *kippyutok* to make tea."

He moved away. Hope found the girl beside him, looking at him with an effect of piercing intentness. She had a thin, dead-white face, broad across the brows and running sharply to a point at her chin, and dense black hair cropped at the level of her ears. He knew her for what she was as surely as if she had been labelled: a part of that leaven of sore hearts and fretful moments, of strained capacity and fevered ideals, which has always forced a ferment in the heavy dough of Russia. Young folk who would remedy with bombs or with bombast those evils which other nations have cured in themselves by the healing operation of centuries!

"Too tired to talk?" she asked.

"Oh, not at all," said Hope. "Only too pleased, of course."

She considered him. "Needn't trouble to be polite," she said curtly. "Waste of time, here, when a list may be called at any moment. Who are you?"

He told her that he was an English tutor employed by the Orlovskys. She shook her head.

"In Russia a tutor may be little more than a servant," she remarked. "In England perhaps it is different. Are you a person about whose death your Government will make a fuss?"

"I don't know," he said doubtfully. "I have an uncle who is an important sort of person; my mother would try to work him up to something. But, you see, about a million better men than I have been killed in the war. What's one unfit Englishman among so many?"

She frowned. "Yes, but—Trubin said that wars were fought by the fit for the unfit, and ultimatums were invariably drafted by elderly gentlemen subject to boils. He said it was safer to insult a foreign flag than a foreign woman, and that all wars were just a stopping-over of accumulated sentimentality."

Hope smiled. "He was a philosopher," he said. "I never heard of him before, though."

"Of whom? Trubin?" asked the girl. "He wasn't the kind of philosopher who writes books. He was just one of us here. You're sitting in his place. They called his name yesterday."

"Er—called his name? You mean——"

The girl went on. "They come in every day with a list and read it out. Those whose names are called stand up and are taken away. We thought they'd arrived when the door was opened for you. Yesterday they called eight, and Trubin was first. He was a priest, you know—but a Roman Catholic one. He talked a lot."

"Somebody might get into trouble for killing a Catholic priest," suggested Hope.

"Perhaps," said the girl wearily. "I hope so. We're all ready for anything; most of us have had a bad time and nobody's afraid. But—they might have left us Trubin; I'll forgive them for killing me when the time comes, but Trubin"—she paused and seemed to seek for a word, and gave it up. She sighed. "He told me," she went off at a tangent, "that I'd get some good out of praying if I'd realize that God was a jolly God and not just a solemn priest. Solemn!"

She fell silent, and Hope had nothing to say. He felt, but had not words in which to tell himself, that here was proof of



the futility of all the jailing and the killing. It was wasted sin. The man who yesterday had been summoned to the slaughter yet lived; the room whence he had been taken was yet full of his presence; his words endured. What shall it profit the assassin if, in dealing death, he but confers an immortality, raising up witnesses against himself of heroic tradition and enduring faith, which no prison can confine and no violence can silence?

Volkov returned presently. He brought with him steaming tea, a thick slice of bread and two withered apples, and laid them beside Hope.

"It's all I could manage to get for the moment," he said. "I had to hurry because it's about time for the list to be called. Still, it's better than nothing."

Hope flushed. "It's more than I can thank you for," he said hesitatingly. "I oughtn't to let you——"

Volkov interrupted him. "You're not depriving anybody of anything," he assured him. "We have everything in common here. It's better stuff than the Soviet serves out because we buy it from the thieves who looted it. Whenever Trubin bought food he used to say he had ransome. So just tuck in!"

It was what Hope had needed. The tea was hot, the bread was eatable, and the apples were pleasant. He had been reaching that stage of fasting when the appetite grows numb; the food and the hot liquid stimulated him like wine. He was drinking the last of the tea when Volkov to one side of him and the girl on the other suddenly lifted their heads. The other people in the room looked up at the same moment. The door was being opened with a jangle of fastenings.

"It's the list," Volkov told Hope. "It's good form here to take no notice unless your own name is called. Just look on calmly."

The feet of the messenger of death and his companions rang loud on the boards of the passage. The people in the room resumed their talk and their other occupations. All over the old and splendid city the same dire ceremony was being performed. If it be true that misery loves company, many a most miserable man and woman might take the comfort of knowing that he or she was not alone, but one of a great host.

The officer in charge of the armed party strode into the

room, burly, with fresh pink cheeks, point-device with sword and uniform and the red armlet of the Soviet. His troops were in the passage; a couple of them—one a khaki-clad Chinaman—stood in the door to watch the naming of the doomed.

"Pay attention!" barked the officer, just as if it were possible for those quiet people, for all their careful calm, to ignore him. "Those whose names are called will stand up and pass out to the passage."

He paused, produced a paper from the breast of his coat, and scanned it.

"Kazakov," he read.

A bearded young man in the uniform of a University student rose at the end of the room and walked the length of it to the door. His face had gone corpse-white, but his gait was steady enough. As he passed he nodded to the girl by Hope's side and his face constricted in an attempt at a smile. Poor hero, he had prepared himself for that, primed his mind through long agonies of foreboding. He came to the door and the soldiers let him through.

"Sorokin!"

A middle-aged man who had been stout—his clothes were baggy about him—looked up over his spectacles and rose deliberately. There was no bravado here, no compulsion of resistant limbs. Placidly, soberly, he got to his feet and went to the door, looking neither to the right nor the left. He went to his death as he might have gone to his barber.

Two more names were called. One was that of a woman. She was tall, long in the face, sharp at the corners, not unlike the conventional boarding-house landlady of the comic papers. The burly officer with the list might have been the angel Ithuriel with his spear, he who unmasks and reveals the true form of whatsoever he touches. At the sound of her name she looked up and a tide of strong living colour suffused its sallowness; and suddenly she was beautiful. Her tall figure seemed to float to uprightness and she showed a face that was radiant—charged and overflowing with that more than human inner power that upholds martyrs and makes them mighty and terrible. Like a queen to the pomp of her bridal she passed down the room; with her head high and her eyes shining she turned and went out at the door.

Hope had followed her with fascinated eyes. Pain he

knew and had endured ; courage, tenacity, patience he had experienced. But that rapt ecstasy of sacrifice was new to him ; it thrilled him and somewhat daunted him. He turned to his neighbours with a whispered comment when the last name was read out.

"Volkov !"

The whisper died on his lips. The grey-haired man gave him a small grimace of a smile, deprecatory and humorous, and began to rise to his feet. Hope's jaw dropped ; his mind staggered. He heard the other speak as from a distance.

"Elena will show you the ropes," said Volkov.

He nodded to the girl, who nodded carelessly back at him. It was the convention of the place ; there is many a great principle crystallized in a convention. Then he swung away, going with the easy, loose strides of a soldier off duty. For this was not a parade ; it was a rendezvous.

The burly officer put away his list, patted his belt to its precise position, and turned to go. Exits were not his strong point ; he called men out to die robustly enough ; but he lumbered through the door with the back view of one who retires worsted from an encounter.

"Here !" said the girl Elena sharply to Hope. "Take a cigarette ; it'll quiet you ! I know how you feel."

Dumbly he took it. All round the room people were lighting cigarettes.

"Trubin said that a cigarette was to a cigar what good intentions are to good works," she remarked presently. Then, as her manner was, she dashed off on a new traverse. "I should like to stand by the death-bed of a Kommissar," she said. "One who died sober and was conscious to the last ; I want to know what death means to a man like that. I want to be sure of what they really are."

"Aren't you sure ?" asked Hope. "Isn't it clear what they are ?"

"No !" she frowned. "It isn't clear. Blood-lust, you'd say ; but when generals in the war were fattening the fields of Europe with dead bodies, one didn't speak of blood-lust. Volkov was a general. No ; mere killing isn't the test. But is there, behind all the bloodshed and the horror, some real compelling inspiration ? Oh, a wrong one, if you like—wrong, futile, crazy—what does that matter ? Men can be sincere in their errors ; one doesn't need to be right to be heroic."

"I'm afraid I can't help you," said Hope. "A man, for me, is wrong when he does wrong, just as a man is dirty when there is dirt on him. It's not a very subtle argument, I know; but the distinction between right and wrong has never seemed to me to be a subtle one."

"But it can be a subtle one," retorted the girl. "That is why judging and condemning others is so frightfully dangerous. Trubin said that if you think any man is fit to judge another you have only to look at our judges."

"Well," said Hope, in a momentary access of unusual acuteness, "isn't it as dangerous to acquit as to condemn?"

She liked that and turned to him quickly. "It depends upon whether——"

She broke off abruptly. The fastenings of the outer door were clanking again. Everybody was looking up. They heard the door open and the noise of footsteps on the bare boards. Once before a list had been called twice in the same day. But those who came along the passage had not the hasty and heavy tread of soldiers.

Two figures appeared in the doorway of the room; a tall, frail old man with a forked, white beard and a high, thin nose; and upon his arm the silvery ghost of an old lady. They came forward, slowly and uncertainly.

"Two prisoners," murmured the girl.

But Hope sprang up with a cry and hastened to meet them. It was the Prince and Princess Orlovsky. Thus the Kommissar Botkin had carried out his promise to inform them.

He bent to kiss the Princess's hand.

"Ah, my dear boy," the old Prince was saying; "this is a great comfort, a great comfort. I do not know what we should do without our dear boy!"

## V

Godfrey Hope never learned in full detail the manner of the arrest of the Orlovskys, with its little touches of Kommissar Botkin's distinctive style. The moment of their arrival was not one for questions and explanations. The Princess, who had walked in upon her husband's arm in an heroic masquerade of nonchalance, her face corpse-white and famine-

thin, but gentle and benign yet, came to the end of her powers at the moment that Hope bent to kiss her hand. She swayed towards him as though in the motion of a slow bow, and but for the feeble support of the Prince's arm and Hope's swift clasp of her, she would have sunk down. She breathed a sigh, in which words were borne faintly.

"Unaccustomed . . . forgive an old woman . . . our dear boy . . ."

The girl Elena appeared swiftly beside Hope. "Let me!" she said, and her arm relieved that of the frail old Prince with her young nervous strength. "My place—help her over to it!"

Together they supported the old lady across the floor and eased her down till she lay upon a spread of coats and blankets, her head, beautiful yet with its coil of silver hair, pillowed upon a bundle. There was no lack of willing helpers; the women in the room were quickly about her and Hope was pressed aside to make way for their ministry. She continued to murmur, in a ghost of a voice and with a flutter of little smiles, her broken phrases of gratitude and apology.

Elena, upon her knees beside her, leaned up and spoke to Hope.

"Leave her to us," she bade. "Go and look after the old gentleman. I'll send for something to eat at once."

The Prince, at Hope's invitation, sat himself down in the angle of the floor and the wall and accepted a cigarette. In spite of his height and the forked flow of his white beard, his unconscious dignity of carriage and his age, there was a simplicity in him, a sincerity of manner and bearing, that made it possible for him thus to squat like a church-door beggar and yet be fine and reverend; even the dreadful attitudes of crucifixion once failed to make a man ridiculous. He seemed bent on excusing his wife's weakness.

"At her age," he said. "And so suddenly, too; I am sure you understand, my dear boy! Everything so sudden; even the great pleasure of seeing you again—I assure you, I feel the effects of the shock myself! But in every other respect, she has been wonderful—wonderful! I have been full of admiration. Her concern was all for you till those men arrived. Really, that young Kommissar is a very deplorable creature!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Hope. "He promised to let you know

what had become of me ; I hoped there had been some mistake in carrying out his orders. But you saw him yourself ?”

“He came in person with his—er—janissaries,” said the Prince. “I could not understand him at all. He was like—like something mechanical ; a figure that you wind up and set going and laugh at because it moves like a man and yet obviously is not one. A marionette, shall we say ?—a marionette dressed for the part of a gentleman, whose strings are pulled by a lackey ? Yes, that conveys it.”

“Ye-es !” Hope smiled. “That conveys it admirably, Excellency.”

He had glimpses—he ear-marked them for future conversations with such as Elena—of a Trotsky trying to make Napoleon behave with probability, a Lenin fumbling with the strings of Mirabeau, a Litvinoff in a hopeless tangle with Talleyrand.

“Was he—were they—rough ?” he asked.

“Oh, no,” answered the Prince. “He was weirdly polite. He took his cigarette from his mouth and waved it gently to and fro—there is a character in the *Revisor* who does it exactly like that—while he informed us, with his eyes half-closed, like that nasty fellow in *La Dame aux Camelias*, that we need no longer fear a death by starvation. We did not answer, of course, and he asked us if we understood. It was then that the Princess spoke. ‘Perfectly,’ she replied. ‘Nor death from old age, either, I presume !’”

Hope nodded.

“Strange how that reply seemed to disconcert him,” went on the Prince. “The marionette visibly stuck for a moment. He snarled an order to his janissaries and we were taken out. I cannot say that our progress through the streets was agreeable ; we were forced to walk rather faster than was easy for us ; but we expected a much worse destination than this. Least of all did we expect to find you. We had feared—ah, we had feared——”

He shook his head, implying something of the night-long torture of apprehension through which the pair of them had lived, huddled for warmth and companionship in a single arm-chair, waiting in doubt and dread, through the hours, picturing to themselves tragedy, horror, the small-change of the life of the time in Russia.

“I will tell you my adventures later, Excellency,” said

Hope. "I see some food coming now. I have only been here a few hours and I don't understand this place yet. But it seems that there are means of getting a few comforts."

The Prince smiled. "A few comforts," he repeated. "Just when we had learned to do without them! It makes me feel rich again."

The food came, a tin bowl of *stchi* and a manchet of bread. A young man, brown-haired, brown-bearded and brown-eyed—an effect of hairy softness, like a Russian village priest or a retriever dog—brought it. He smiled shyly as he set it down before the Prince.

"I can only say for it that it is hot," he said.

"I could say more than that," answered the Prince; "but all my thanks would take a long time."

The young man waved the thanks from him. "I have done nothing but carry it," he protested. "It is not my gift; I wish it were."

"Whose, then?" asked the Prince.

The other smiled again and shrugged vaguely. "Ah!" said the Prince, as though all were now quite clear to him, and began to eat. He knew his Russia, knew it as a wise husband knows the dark mind of a whimsical wife, the insincerity of its visible processes, the secrecy and tortuosity of its realities. Somewhere, ambushed in the mad disorder of the revolution, a tenacious goodwill towards such prisoners as he had dug itself in; money trickled from hand to thievish hand, diminishing as it went; lies were told, treachery subsidized, theft condoned that an old man, halting at the last but one station of his cross, might have a bowl of cabbage-soup. It was only one of the thousand ways in which the great ideal of the world revolution, whence should arise the apotheosis of labour, was being bought and sold daily. The trumpeters who menaced the walls of the capitalist Jericho scrambled for the pennies thrown to them from the battlements.

The early evening filled the windows and the night came upon its heels. Around the large rooin groups of prisoners lit candles; the little flames of them, scattered about the place, had the look of a nursery illumination, a suggestion of a Christmas festivity. An evening meal of bread and tea was issued, and over it the voices weaved back and forth pleasantly. There was even a little laughter. Why not? In the Jewish legend, even the flames of Hell subside on the Sabbath; so

surely Death may sheathe his sting and the grave forgo its victory at meal-times.

Hope crossed the room to where the Princess lay. She was asleep. One hand was under her cheek, and upon her worn face, surrendered to rest, there dwelt, as it were, a fugitive recollection of girlishness and prettiness. He stooped, looking at it, and was aware of the girl Elena seated close by and making signs to him. He nodded and went to sit beside her.

"She'll be all right, now," said the girl.

"Yes," said Hope. "Better off than she's been for a long time. I didn't contrive things very well for them, I'm afraid, and there was nobody else to look after them."

Her thin face jerked round to look full at him.

"Don't," she said. "Don't talk like that. She's been telling us about you. 'Our dear boy,' she calls you. She says that she and the Prince implored you, ordered you—all but knelt to you—to abandon them when you could have saved yourself. You wouldn't! *Why* wouldn't you?"

Hope moved uneasily. "Oh," he said awkwardly; "couldn't do that, you know!"

"No!" her face came nearer to his, the heavy brows contracted, the big eyes afire. "Of course you couldn't. It wouldn't have been *you* that you saved—not *you*, the loyal, the brave, the strong—but some deserter, some coward, some traitor, wearing your name."

"I say!" protested Hope, startled. "I can't let you think that I——"

Her short hair slashed to and fro over the nape of her neck to the vehement shake of her head.

"Oh, I know!" she interrupted. "But can't you see? You are—well, a nobody, just a very ordinary young man of your class. This thing that you have done comes naturally to you; you couldn't have done otherwise. That is so? Well, tell me, how *can* these Bolsheviks conquer—ever? Torture, starvation, death—they have no other weapons; and against them is all the honour, the sacrifice, the—the *love*—of the world! Savages with tomahawks against guns and aeroplanes! Don't you—don't you pity them?"

Hope stared at her. He was not a hero and he knew it; but he was a gentleman and he knew that, too. Curious that the distinction was not as plain to her as it was to him.



"Pity them—pity these blood-drinkers!" he exclaimed. "No, I don't!"

"I do," she said. "From my heart I pity them, 'for they know not what they do!' All that we hoped for our great people and for the world—and they have put back the clock of democracy by a hundred years!"

The candles on the floor spilled their light abroad over the bare boards; the sparks of cigarettes showed as though floating above that pool of mild radiance, and faces were dim and grotesquely pitted with shadows. The night was dense without by now, and the room had ceased to suggest to Hope an effect of a lighted nursery; rather it reminded him of one of those sweat-and-rags scented chapels of the city where all night long the worshippers and the tramps and the thieves throng amid the lighted ikons. The girl had fallen silent beside him, savouring who knows what tormenting ferment of wild altruism and remorseless intellect. The Prince came across, kneeled, and very gently kissed the brow of his sleeping wife, gave a bow to Hope's companion, and went back to his place. People were settling down for sleep here and there; the voices of the others fell low and infrequent; the room darkened as one candle after another was put out. Before Hope's eyes, brooding upon the gloom, ghosts began to walk. The woman of that morning who, when her name was called, had stood up transfigured and beautified, passed before him again, moving with that high carriage with which she had advanced upon her doom; he saw her raised face, tranquil and abrim with peace. Others came with her—General Volkov, still smiling, and yet others, men and women, whom he did not know. One, tall, but plump in the face, with merry wrinkles and quick, roguish eyes was, assuredly, the oft-quoted Trubin. They moved before him, a company of that great host which he was to join, pioneers who had explored the way for him and found it easy.

"'Gentlemen unafraid!'" he quoted to himself, and was unaware that he had spoken audibly. But the girl had heard. He felt her shoulder press against his as she leaned to him.

"You see them, too?" she whispered, in a single gasp. "You see them, too?"

"Eh?" He was startled. He had seen, he knew, creations of his fancy; in other words, he had seen nothing. "See—what?"

Her thin shoulder pressed closer. "Them!" she answered, still whispering. "They were going through the room, scores of them; Volkov was among them. You saw them? Oh, tell me if you saw them?"

The need to answer broke up his mood of vision. He felt the embarrassment of a boy caught writing verses. Men of his kind talk neither of their dreams nor their prayers. He would have liked to withdraw the shoulder against which she leaned.

"Tell me!" she persisted.

"There was nothing to see," he said, protestingly. "I was just—thinking."

She murmured something inarticulate and continued to rest against him. She was silent for a space of seconds; then:

"I saw them, too!" she breathed.

"I tell you," said Hope, "there was nothing to see. You're letting your imagination run away with you. And, excuse me—my shoulder——"

He moved to disengage himself. But an arm flung round behind him, caught and held him.

"Wait!" The low voice compelled him. "I want to tell you something—since you have seen them, too!" He stirred at this, but the clinging arm restrained him. "To-morrow morning they will call my name. I know it!"

"How do you know?"

Her head was close to him; her hair brushed his cheek.

"I don't know how I know it, but I know it. I know it certainly and surely; I think—*they*—told me. Listen to me! I am sure of it; and to-morrow night, when they pass through, I will be with them. You shall see me."

"But——"

The arm tightened again. "Are you afraid of me?" came the whisper. "Surely, in all the world there is nobody you need be less afraid of than me—now! My arm? I can't drag you with me. You would lend your shoulder—wouldn't you?—to any woman who was going down a steep place! It is all I want, and you make me beg for it."

"Oh, I say!" Hope was shocked. "It—it isn't that, really. It's simply that I can't believe this—this presentiment of yours. You're—er—overwrought; that's what it is. And I only wanted——"

He paused, saving himself only just in time from blunt bathos.

"Yes? You only wanted—what?"

"Well—" Hope hesitated. "It's the Prince. He's old, you know, and rather stiff in the joints, and lately, you see—well, I was going to take his boots off for him, as a matter of fact, and just bed him down for the night. Then I should have come back."

"Ah!" The arm that clung released him. "Go and take his boots off, then. But you will come back?"

"I promise," said Hope.

He moved over to the other side of the room to render to the old man the little services which had become habitual since their flight to Moscow. The girl's whispered talk and that hungry, clinging arm had disturbed him in an unaccustomed fashion; he felt that she had compromised him in his own eyes, trapped him into sharing an attitude which revolted him, spied upon his secret and untellable thoughts; and yet, that harsh whispering, the crush of the thin shoulder against his, the dimness and the stillness had pricked through his crust and touched the depths of him.

"You have found a friend?" asked the old Prince, as Hope knelt at his feet.

"I don't even know her surname," answered Hope. "Queer girl; got a lot of mixed-up ideas." He drew off a boot. "Is that comfortable, sir?"

"It is a relief," said the old gentleman. "You, too, have a lot of mixed-up ideas, Godfrey. You call yourself a gentleman and here you are serving me as a valet."

"Rotten valet, I'm afraid, Excellency," said Hope, busy with the straps of the other *sapog*.

The Prince's white beard swayed to and fro in the gloom as he gently shook his head. "The best in the world," he said. "For there is no servant so good as a son."

"Here she comes!" said Hope, hurriedly, as he eased the boot from the weary foot. "Now, let's see about making it comfortable for you to lie down. Don't move, sir; I can manage."

He busied himself with what coverings he could find. "He'll kiss me if I give him a chance," he thought. He felt bitter; why couldn't these people stew in the juice of their own feelings without splashing it over him.

He put the Prince to bed briskly, giving him no further openings for embarrassing talk.

"If you want anything in the night," he said finally, "just call out. I'll be somewhere near."

The girl was sitting where he had left her, her arms clasped around her knees, her head bowed above them. She did not look up at his return; he hesitated, lest she had fallen asleep, then sat down beside her.

"Well?" he said. He spoke low, for the sake of those who slumbered about him, but with an effort at a cheery and stimulating tone. "Well? Feeling better now?"

For some seconds yet she remained as she was; then she raised her head slowly.

"Ah!" she said. "You don't understand at all. You don't even believe that I know. You think I have a presentiment and that I am frightened. Don't you think that I am frightened?"

"Er—" Hope temporized. "Not frightened, of course. Just—er——"

"You do!" she interrupted him, fierceness thrilling through her whisper. "You *do* think I'm frightened, and all you do is to sneer at me!"

"Look here!" Hope sat upright with a jerk. "I swear I don't sneer at you. I never sneered at anybody in my life. And if you really believe in that—that presentiment of yours, I don't see why you shouldn't be frightened. I'm certain I should be. But it's only a presentiment, of course."

"Oh!" she shrugged. "Presentiment! I *can't* make you believe. And if I could—if I could—it would be no use. You wouldn't help me."

"I assure you, I'd do anything on earth," protested Hope.

"Would you—would you be gentle and comforting to a girl who never had and never needed gentleness and comfort? Would you let her know how it feels to be—to be folded close from fear and harm? To pass her burden to another and be passive and safe? Would you do that?"

"If I could," faltered Hope. "I'm awfully sorry, but I'm not much good at that sort of thing. Still, if I can help you at all——"

Her shoulder was against his again, and with it the full weight of her.

"Hold me, then!" she whispered. "Hold me in your arms."

She lay there, with her head on his breast, his arms about her, as he leaned back against the wall. Both were silent for a long space. When next she spoke he realized with a start of his consciousness that he had been dozing.

"Yes," she murmured; "this is what I wanted—just once! If I had really been frightened, this would have helped me."

"Eh? You weren't——"

"Don't move," she said. "Stay as you are. No; I've never been frightened of anything. I've never felt any of the proper things. Too late to feel them now—except this. Don't move!"

Her murmuring voice wandered on. The low breathed sing-song of it was a lullaby.

"Incomplete!" it said. "Half a mind and no soul; not even completely a woman. Can't hurt and can't help—time to finish with it—can't even hate or love completely—a neutral—an alien——"

It continued, down there on his bosom. His arms framed a confessional; his breast was a Gethsemane. And Hope, like others who could not watch the while of a passion, drooped his head in utter weariness and sank to sleep.

He did not wake even when he rolled over and she perforce raised her head from where it rested. He slept on while she put his folded coat under his head for a pillow and spread a mantle of her own over him. He never knew how she sat through the night, smoking cigarette after cigarette, turning at intervals to bend over him and look intently into his face, candid and self-revealing in the abandon of slumber.

When he awoke to the tarnished prison daylight she was not beside him. He sat up, swallowing a groan at the pains of his stiffened muscles, and saw that without the windows at each end of the room snow was falling in great leisurely flakes, looking black against the sky. To his left, the Princess still slept, and across the room the Prince had not roused yet. Many of the other prisoners were also asleep, but a few had procured tea and were gathered in groups to drink it. In a corner, the young brown-haired man who had served the Prince on the previous evening had propped a tiny ikon against the wall and was kneeling before it. The air was foul with the night's use and the smoke and smell of many

cigarettes ; but at least it was warm, and in Moscow warmth was all but wealth.

While he sat, gathering energy to get up, the girl appeared from the corridor and came towards him. She had a glass of tea in each hand, paper-wrapped for the protection of her fingers, and clamped between her elbow and her side was a slab of bread. She walked slowly, that she might not spill the tea ; he had time to remark her boyish slimness and a certain careless grace in her gait.

"I was going to wake you," she said. "Catch hold of this glass, will you ? I knew you'd want to be up when the Prince wakes."

"You shouldn't have troubled to fetch this," said Hope.

"No trouble !" She sat down. "When you want to get anything here, you go and knock on the door. The sentry'll open the peep-hole and call that old thief of a doorkeeper. Order what you want, and when he says he hasn't got any—he always says that—you swear at him."

"Thanks," said Hope, sipping at his tea. He knew she was looking at him, and he was unwilling to return her gaze. "I'll remember that—especially the swearing."

"Do," she said. "It's important ! And talking of remembering—" (she paused, hesitated as though in thought) "do you remember last night ?"

He felt that he was reddening furiously. "No," he answered. "I don't remember anything you don't want me to. Not a thing !"

She smiled. "You were wonderfully good to me," she said. "You understand now, don't you ?"

His reply made it very clear that he had understood nothing at all.

"Quite !" he answered. "Jolly glad I was able to help, you know. Beastly things, those presentiments ! My mother has them, and, though nothing ever happens, they often worry her a lot. And my old nurse claimed to have 'second-sight.' Awful lies she used to tell."

"But—" She stared in frank amaze. "Presentiments ! Again ! My poor boy, *that* wasn't a presentiment ! That was—that is—just cast-iron truth. And all the time you were thinking—oh, what a shame ! You did all that for me and never knew what you were doing. I'm ever so sorry."

"I suppose I'm a fool," said Hope, resignedly. With

broad daylight for his ally he wasn't going to be trapped into glamorous and crepuscular moods. "The day before yesterday I met a village idiot, and she found her affinity in me at once. And it's perfectly true that I only understand one word in three of all you say."

"All right," she said. "I won't say anything more about it till you know."

Her nod pointed her words.

"I don't know!" retorted Hope. "It's all so—so blooming silly."

"Isn't it?" she agreed. "But we're a silly people and this is a silly country. And there's your silly Prince waking up. You attend to him and I'll take charge of the old lady."

The Prince had slept well, and was mildly cheerful, with a touch of that humour of old age which knows that life has nearly exhausted its ammunition both of good and evil.

"Really," he observed, "one might be worse off than here. After all one has heard of prisons in sewers and stokeholds, one might be much worse off. The end, of course, is the same in any case; that one allows for; but even a sailor cast away upon a cannibal island must find the fattening process agreeable. Apropos of fattening—there is to be breakfast? Yes?"

"I'll get it for you," answered Hope. "I'll bring it over to the Princess, shall I? You'd like to have it with her."

The old Prince beamed at him. "And you will join us? Our little domesticity remains? Now *that* is charming."

Elena's instructions how to obtain food proved sound. Others had been before him on the same business and the door to the landing stood ajar. The sentry lounged against the balustrade, smoking, and the fat old man from the doorway below, wearing a Cossack caftan with a rope round his equator and looking like a monk run to seed, raised a lamentable outcry at Hope's demands.

"Tea, you say! Plenty of tea! And bread! And everything else there is! Oh, Redeemer, he thinks I keep a restaurant! And not a penny of money does he offer me—me, with nothing but my rations! A poor old man, starving and freezing, and he expects——"

He raised both arms, with the great work-deformed hands and the curved talons of fingers at the end of them, and

lifted his foul old face in a wonderful gesture of appeal to heaven. Behind his back the sentry grinned amusedly.

"Hurry, now!" commanded Hope.

"What?" The prayerful arms dropped. The Judas-eye stabbed at his searchingly, and found nothing dangerous. "What? You are giving me orders, you half-corpsé? You, with the worms clamouring because you keep them waiting! You won't be so high and mighty with them."

Hope's pupil had been an anæmic child of eleven, who had passed too much time about the stables and the servants' quarters, and the tutor's first duty had been to reduce the red corpuscles of his vocabulary. Elena had told him to swear; he swore.

"You old ——!" The first epithet was a word of power. In the full spate of his denunciation the bloated old jail-flunkie jarred to staggered silence. Coming from Hope, with his mild and comely face, whereon seemliness was stamped as though with a die, it was as though a wax doll had spoken. "You God-forgotten —— of a ——!"

There is a sensuousness, a luxury of release from trammels, in a certain sort of cursing. Hope, having dipped his toes in the mud of it, decided to take a mud-bath, and prattled like a drunken *istvostchik*. The sentry stood upright to listen and chuckled aloud; the subject of the discourse sagged and shrivelled.

"But—but—I am going as quickly as I can! Doesn't your honour see that I am eager to obey? All that I can get —*siu minutu!* *Bozhe moi!* What a tongue—what a tongue!"

He flapped off upon his errand distractedly. From behind Hope's shoulder sounded a choked giggle and he turned to find the dark thin face of Elena.

"You are an artist," she said. "It was wonderful. Fancy *you*, of all people!"

"I had no idea you were within hearing," said Hope. "I'm awfully sorry."

She made a small grimace. "You'd say that if I happened to catch you undressed. Only God may know you when you're unbuttoned. You've got buttons on your soul."

"Oh, have I?"

"Yes," she jeered. "Pretty little pearly buttons all up and down in rows, and pink ribbons tied in bows, and lace round the edges! Well," and she nodded her sharp signi-



ficant nod to him ; "take care ; I'll tear all those buttons open for you this morning."

"Now you're beginning all over again," complained Hope, uncomfortably.

She laughed quietly. "After I promised I wouldn't, too," she rejoined. "All right, I'll be good now. I suppose you won't wait and swear at him for me ?"

"Hardly necessary, is it ?" suggested he. "You can madden him enough without swearing."

"Poor boy !" was her answer.

The Princess, too, was the better for her repose, for the time being, at any rate. She sat against the wall amid the coats and coverlets, and contrived to have the effect of a gentle hostess, abolishing with her presence and the infection of her delicacy and amiability all that was frantic and fantastic in that bivouac on the steps of the scaffold.

"It snows, I see," remarked the Prince. "I wonder if they will clear the streets. Dirty stuff, snow ! Just mud in the making."

"They will clear some streets for their own sakes," said Elena. "And one they will keep passable for ours."

"Eh ? For ours ?" The Prince seemed not to understand ; then suddenly it came to him. "Ah, yes ! I see. Quite so !"

"I oughtn't to have spoken of it," said the girl ; "but I didn't know whether Mister Hope had told you how things are arranged. We have a sort of etiquette, and it is as well you should be warned of it in time."

"Assuredly, assuredly !" agreed the Prince. "One wishes to be in the fashion. Is it not so, my dear ?"

The Princess smiled softly. "One would certainly not choose that one's last step should be a *faux pas*," she agreed.

The girl went on to explain briefly, much as Volkov had explained to Hope, the convention of a stiff upper-lip that obtained when the daily list was called. The old couple nodded.

"Oh, that is understood," said the Prince. "It is very much the private affair of each person concerned. I should not dream of intruding myself upon a man at such a moment. I hope, though, that they do not—er—separate husband and wife ?"

"If they do, they soon reunite them," said the Princess, still with her soft smile.

The girl looked from one to the other as they spoke, seeming to study them and to turn over their words for buried meanings. Her unrest of mind could not understand their suave and uncritical acceptance of facts and conditions. She seemed about to speak, when her eyes rested on Hope, who was watching her, and she checked herself.

"My dear, you will take a cigarette?" inquired the Prince.

"I really think I might," decided the Princess. "So long since I have smoked, isn't it?"

He gave her one and held the paper match while she lit it. She leaned back, drew upon it, then closed her eyes while she inhaled the smoke, the cigarette meanwhile poised between fingers not too clean, but still long and dainty of contour. Then she released the smoke in a slow out-breath that sent it forth in a cloud that floated before her face.

"It is very bad for me," she said, smiling through the mist of it. "My doctor used to warn me. 'It is poison for you,' he used to tell me. And later, he himself died through falling into a well when he was drunk."

She was talking yet when there sounded the heart-catching alarm that was the apex of the prison door—the clatter of the door being opened. They had not noticed among themselves how talk in the room had died down as one after the other fell silent in an expectancy of nervous strain. The loud-booted feet of the officer and his mamelukes rang on the boards of the corridor; faces, ashen, with mouths that twitched uncontrollably, or quelled to a stony calm, lifted to the doorway.

"The list, I suppose?" asked the Prince.

The girl nodded. She was seated at the feet of the Princess, who had Hope on the other side. She bent forward now to catch his eye; her own was alight with a queer, humorous malice. She had the look of one who prepares a taunt for a friend's discomfiture, the "what-did-I-tell-you?" look. And suddenly Hope, who could find no overmastering thrill in the possibility that he might hear his own name called out—the days that were passed had dulled and familiarized his capacity for fear as pain will dull an overworked nerve—felt a sickness take possession of him. It settled within him like a physical ill; the face with which he returned her look was blanched and stricken. He could not see clearly enough to mark how she softened at that token of his distress; he had

to pass his hand over his eyes to look plainly at the solid bulk of the tight-belted officer who stamped into his accustomed position.

He struggled with his weakness. His normal consciousness railed at him. *She* had done this to him with her twilight murmurings, her ghosts, and her presentiments. She had found an unexpected breach in his matter-of-fact armour and stabbed him through it. Just let her wait till this ghastly business was over!

The stout officer produced from the bosom of his uniform overcoat the folded paper of names. He made a business of getting his fur-lined gauntlet off and tucking it within his belt, frowning the while in profound official reserve, his plump face rosy from the air, his short beard glistening here and there where snowflakes had melted upon it. Sixteen men and five women watched him the while, with hearts that limped and faces stiffened to masks.

He finished with his glove, settled his sword with a wagtail twitch of his haunch, cleared his throat as though for a speech, and unfolded the paper. Still frowning, he scanned it, while hell-fire eternities spun their length and renewed themselves.

Then he spoke a name.  
"Maximova!"

A great gust of breaths released sounded in the room, and eyes travelled about it to mark the owner of the name. There was a fraction of an instant during which none responded. Then, unhurried, with no outward perturbation, Elena rose to her feet.

She seemed taller than ever to Hope, sitting on the floor and looking up at her. He had never heard her *familia*, her surname, before, and when it was called he had known a warmth of relief. Now, he could only stare, with hanging jaw, and a voiceless agony numbing his faculties, as she stood. It all passed in a second or two; there was no indecorous delay; yet for him each movement of hers was a separate event, occupying its own isolated compartment of time, cut off from that which went before and that which followed. He saw her bend her gaze, full of meaning, of many meanings that later he laboured to decipher, upon him where he crouched; he marked the slowly widening curve of her lips. They were like unrelated happenings set far apart in a grotesque history:

Then she bent towards him, swaying down as though to kneel upon one knee and her hand was on his shoulder. Her face came close, vivid as a thing seen by lightning. She spoke; her low words crept in upon his sense.

"Remember!" said the whisper. "I shall be there. To-night! Remember!"

Her face came closer still. It touched his. Soft cool lips pressed themselves upon his nerveless mouth for a long instant; and then she was upright again. She turned and walked towards the door.

"No—no!" He thought he was shouting it furiously; he tore at himself to rise and go after her. Only the Princess heard that cry and saw the vain surge of inhibited muscles. She put out a gentle hand and laid it on his arm, and at her touch he collapsed and leaned sideways against her knee. At the door, a tall ragamuffin of a soldier put out an arm and drew the girl into the corridor.

"Tropinin!" barked the officer. Someone rose and went out. Another name—another exit; four in all to join that company whereof Elena was one. Then the clumsy departure of the officer, and it was over, and the occupants of the room sank back, slack with strain, to the contemplation of another twenty-four hours of life in jail. And some, perhaps, to follow in fascinated imagination those elected four through the new snow to the bleak yard where they should look their last through slow-floating flakes upon the black sky that bends over Russia.

When it was time for the midday meal Hope rose, fetched the rations, and went through the motions of service to his companions. They did not speak to him save for trivial talk when their very silence tended to become burdensome with significance; Elena's name was not spoken. They knew, all three of them, that ere they broke bread she had been freed of her shackles for ever and the tempestuous mind lulled to an unending calm.

Did she come as she had promised, when the candles were being put out and the voices sank, when night filled the windows and the sills were swelling cushions of snow? He sat by himself, unmoving through the hours, eyes looking unwinkingly before him. No dreams, now; no hospitality of the drowsy mind for shapes fashioned out of shadows and memories! Her presence was all about him; the shape of

her lips was moulded upon his. She had indeed ripped the buttons off his tight-laced soul.

In the night the Princess woke and murmured his name. He went quickly to her. She was thirsty, and he brought her a pannikin of water.

"You do not sleep?" she asked him when she had drunk. "Oh, my dear, you should sleep, for in sleep we are very near to those we love. Do you know, Godfrey, I feel that there is happiness in store for you yet!"

"There is no happiness for blundering fools," he answered.

"Hush!" she said. "I saw what you blundered into, dear boy. You had—and you gave—one great moment. For an instant you soared like a great strong-winged angel; you can never come down to the old level again. At least you have lived."

"I don't want to live," he said. "I'm not fit to live. I'm not a man at all. I'm just a blind prim parasite that is left at home when real men go out to fight. An old maid—yes, that's what I am—sterile and profitless and absurd!"

Her hands closed on his wrist. "Ah," she said; "good men should be thankful that they have not to judge themselves. But when you are judged I shall be there to testify—I and my dear husband. You know him, Godfrey; all his long life he has lived in stainless honour, in kindness, and in courage. And to-night he told me that whenever you knelt to help him with his boots, he felt so humble that he had to talk to keep himself from weeping. He said that to me himself."

Hope sighed miserably. "It's like a conspiracy to comfort me," he said. "But I know myself." He paused. Then, dearly: "I hardly understood a word she said and *then* I didn't believe it."

The old Princess made little noises of sympathy. He kissed her hand upon his sleeve and went back to his vigil. The grey was in the sky ere sleep stole upon him.

It still snowed that morning; winter had arrived in state. Of two new prisoners who arrived, both starving students, one had a frost-bitten foot following a night in Kommissar Botkin's cold-storage chamber, and could only sit rocking himself to and fro and moaning with the agony of the returned blood. The other reported that Red soldiers had made a house-to-house perquisition for emergency snow-shovellers,

and that men, women and children were labouring in the chief streets under armed overseers. The new ballet at the once Imperial Opera House was said to be a revelation of consummate art. An attempt to assassinate Trotsky had failed.

The bearer of tidings had a glass of tea in his hand, and sipped from it between items of information. His bleached-white face was silly with self-importance; he patronized the prisoners gathered round to listen to him like a city man bragging before rustics.

"Oh, yes," he said; "the world is very lively just now. Nuisance being stuck in here just at this moment! Shan't be here long, though; Botkin told me himself—Botkin the Kommissar, you know—he said to me: 'It's only for a day or two,' he said. 'You'll be quite comfortable there. You'll be sorry when your time comes to leave!' But don't you get any news here at all?"

"Yes!" It was Hope who answered him. His ear had caught the first of the bolts of the outer door being drawn back. "Every morning we get news. You'll find it thrilling. Here it comes now!"

The prisoners scattered to their places; Hope went over and sat down by the Prince and Princess. All were silent except the new prisoner with his glass in his hand.

"What's it all about?" he was demanding; "what's the idea?"

The tramp of feet, the thud of rifles grounded on the boards of the passage, and the entry of the officer silenced him. He remained, gaping apprehensively, while the usual lunatic ritual achieved itself.

The gloves, the belt, the folded paper, the portentous frown, the preliminary cough!

"Like a trained pig!" murmured Hope. "If the gloves were missing he wouldn't be able to go on!"

The Princess smiled at him and exchanged a look with the Prince. Godfrey Hope was sitting with crossed legs and an unmistakable sneer of mere contempt on his face. There was a manner of impatience about him, too, that boded ill for the convention of calm silence if he were kept waiting much longer.

The paper rustled in the thick fingers. The officer stared at it and seemed for a moment to hesitate. He looked at it more closely, then tentatively read aloud:

"Gope!"

"Huh!" Hope snorted. "Didn't know how to pronounce it, the fool!"

He heaved up, took the Princess's hand and kissed it. The Prince gripped his other hand.

"One of those others will take care of you," he said, nodded, and walked to the door.

## VI

The short passage from the room to the outer door was full of soldiers, and there were more on the landing; a grandiose escort for four or five meek and unresisting prisoners. The stench of them filled the narrow place like a noxious vapour. Hope, as they thrust him onward between them towards the door, had a confused impression of a character that was common to all of them and salient in each. It was something akin to putrefaction, a foul disintegration of the human and civilized semblance of man, so that an inward horror of soul-rot was visible as an outward bestiality of countenance. Their broken clothes were supplemented with odds and ends of uniform, and each had his rifle with its permanently fixed bayonet and the red armlet of the Soviet. There were two Chinamen among them.

It was to such as these, the hard-working journeymen of the execution squads, that Elena had gone out; to the ruined, gleeful faces, the great, black-nailed hands, the cesspool vile-ness that were to be the last she should see and feel of her country and her countrymen.

They shoved him out upon the landing. The stairs above and those below had their knots of onlookers, for parts of the house still harboured civilian occupants, and he was aware of their eyes, rising over him in tiers, alight with a fearful and excited pleasure in the spectacle of men brought out to die. There was a scuffling behind him and another victim shoved forth. It was the brown-bearded young man who prayed each morning before the tiny ikon. He had managed the walk to the door composedly enough, but the actual hands upon him had unmanned him; his face was blue and white in blotches and his lips writhed.

"Cheer up!" said Hope. "Think of the women who've gone through this!"

The other gasped and staggered against the banisters, to which he clung with both hands.

The others whose names had been called joined them one by one, till five of them stood there, ringed in by their gruesome guards. There were no women this morning. The officer came forth last.

"Take 'em down, comrades!" he commanded.

The armed men shuffled to their work. A Chinaman took Hope by one arm; a weazened creature with an impishly portentous manner of face such as one sees sometimes in hunchbacks, fastened on to the other. To each prisoner there were two chaperons, and in this order they made their descent of the stairs to the hallway below, where the pot-bellied keeper of the door rose from his chair to behold them. Snow fell yet in the street and the chill of the air flowed in to meet them.

There was a closed van backed to the kerb with two miserable frameworks of horses hitched to it. Its doors were open, showing its empty interior and the mud upon its floor. It had been found politic in Moscow to carry out the executions with less parade than heretofore; the effect upon large sections of the public of seeing just such men and women as themselves being hounded to their graves had not been all that was hoped for it. Hence this carriage-exercise for the doomed.

"Well," cried the officer, "what are we waiting for? In with them!"

He himself was busy with that everlasting glove of his, stroking each finger of it separately into place. He stood with feet wide apart as he did so, looking on while the first three of the dead-cart's load were shoved aboard. Then something occurred to him.

"Hold on a minute!" he called. "Where's that comrade from the Kommissar's headquarters?"

A young soldier, completely uniformed from cap to boots, had been standing by the van looking on. He came forward now.

"I was forgetting you," said the officer. "Let me see now—the *Anglichanin*! Gope was his name. Which of you swine is Gope?"

Hope answered. "Me, comrade!"

"Eh?" The officer needed room for his wits to turn in



ere he saw the point of the retort. The dwarfish creature who held Hope by the left arm cackled with laughter.

"Call me 'comrade,' you damned bourgeois!"

The back-handed blow in the face knocked Hope backwards, so that, but for his held arms, he would have fallen. The two guards hoisted him up and heaved him forwards for the remainder of an inhuman thrashing, when the young soldier intervened.

"My orders were," he remarked, "that the Kommissar particularly wanted him all in one piece."

He spoke in the voice of an educated man; his face was that of a man of breeding. He looked at the officer coolly.

"Damn the Kommissar!" blustered the other.

"Right; I'll give him your message," said the soldier indifferently. He lifted his rifle, turned and began to walk away.

"Here, curse you!" called the officer uneasily. "Wait a second, can't you?"

He strode after the soldier and the two stood for some minutes in talk under the snow. Meanwhile, the dead-cart waited with its shuddering load, and the executioners stamped their feet and swore at the delay.

The officer and the soldier came back together. "Let him go!" commanded the former. "The Kommissar wants to keep him as a pet, it seems. Lot of blasted silly nonsense! Get ready to start that van, there!"

The final victim was thrust in and the doors shut. The poor wrecks of horses were bludgeoned into activity; the armed men slouched beside the conveyance, and the whole arrangement departed, dragging its way along the snow-muffled street like the nightmare of a funeral. Hope was left alone with the soldier.

"Come on," said the latter. "Let's be moving!"

Hope remained where he was. "Where to?" he demanded.

"Headquarters," replied the other. "Surprised, are you? Thought you were bound for the pits, eh?"

Still Hope did not move. He found himself unable to think. He was being swirled here and there like the snow-flakes that fell outside upon winds that blew whither they listed. Here was a respite; but respite was not what he had

desired. Of emotion, of repercussion to his fate, he knew only an angry and vicious resentment.

"Come on!" said the soldier again.

Hope turned his head and looked at him across his shoulder.

"Suppose I won't?" he challenged.

The soldier pursed his lips. "Oh, I think you'd better," he answered. "You'll only put me to the trouble of dragging you there."

He was a big youth, about twice the bulk of Hope, lightly bronzed, with well-shaped and regular features.

"It's for you to choose, of course," he added indifferently. "But if you take my advice you'll come on."

"I'll come," said Hope finally.

He was without cap or overcoat, and his boots were wide open to the snow of the pavement. It was the custom in the prison to leave one's superfluities for those who remained. But the pain and discomfort of the cold were only further aggravations of his mood of bitterness and rebellion.

They overtook and passed the dead-cart floundering along the unswept street with its macabre escort about it and the officer striding abreast of it on the footpath. The driver was using a fixed bayonet as a goad to torture his dying horses along. From within the closed box of the vehicle there came no sound.

"Might have let me have a cab for you on a day like this," remarked the soldier. "Still, even walking's better than *that*." He made a motion of his head towards the van. "I narrowly missed a ride in that thing myself."

Hope showed no interest. "Arrested for being too well dressed," persisted the soldier. "Anybody whose shirt-tail isn't sticking out of his pants is a bourgeois for these people. I only managed to volunteer at the last moment; my name was actually down for the next cellar-party!"

"What?" Hope looked at him. "You volunteered?"

"I did," answered the other cheerfully. "Enlisted under good old Botkin, who used to hold the door open for me at a motor showroom. That's what you're doing, isn't it?"

Into Hope's face there rose all the disgust he choked down in shame at the villainy and ugliness.

"You filthy swine!" he said distinctly. "You false hound!"

But words could not jar the composure of the young man who had made the great betrayal without twitching an eyelid. He gave a half-smile, and looked down at Hope under supercilious brows. The Kommissar Botkin had that trick too.

"Oho!" he said. "So that's the kind of talk! I didn't know I had the honour of escorting a martyr. Well, my friend, you can count on dear old Botkir and his lady friends to give you all the martyrdoms you want. Personally, I'd rather go out to the pits and have it over; but there's no accounting for tastes."

"Shut your accursed mouth!" cried Hope.

"As you please!" agreed the other. "Not surprised you want to think things over in peace. Only thinking won't improve 'em—as you'll see!"

But he was silent thenceforward, save that at times he whistled jauntily to himself, moving along at Hope's side in his well-fitting uniform with the lounging stride of a boulevardier.

The Venus Anadyomene, naked in marble, beamed with sightless eyes over Hope's head as he ascended the splendid sweep of Rinaldescu's staircase. The great double doors of the room with the coloured windows let him in to the intimate glories of Kommissar Botkin; and the Kommissar himself, in a velvet dressing-jacket, was there to receive him. This time, though, his chair at the desk was occupied by a girl whom Hope had seen before in that room. Sashenka—he remembered her name with an effort. The Kommissar sat on a corner of the big desk in talk with her; he hitched round as Hope entered.

"Ah!" he cried; "it is Mister Hope! How are you, Mister Hope?"

His sallow face, meanly handsome, like cheap imitation jewellery, put on a mask of light-hearted suavity. The usual cigarette was gummed to his lip. He had been using some strong scent, for that kind of Russian deems it necessary to be odorous, and Hope, advancing from the door, found himself walking into the sickly reek of it with a sense of sinking into an abominable embrace. He halted some paces from the desk; and once more the gilt-framed mirror behind the big chair showed him his own face, gaunt, strained, stained with blood from his nose and discoloured on one cheek where the officer had struck him.

The girl in the big chair was staring at him.

"What have they been doing to him?" she asked. "You fool, you've had him knocked about till she won't know him."

"My dear Sasha, you heard my orders." The Kommissar turned to the soldier, who was still standing at the door, with a curt question.

"None of my doing," answered the soldier. He related briefly the facts of Hope's encounter with the officer.

"You can go," said Botkin briefly. "You see, my dear, it's an accident. She'll know him all right. But we can wash him, if you like; a bucket and a scrubbing-brush will make him as good as new. Shall we?"

The girl uttered a snap of sound that resembled, and probably was, an oath, and continued to stare at Hope. There was in their regard, in their manner of talking of him in his presence and their appearance of judging him as to his suitability for some unknown purpose, the impersonality with which they might have viewed his dead body.

"Let him alone," said the girl. "You've done quite enough to him."

Botkin smiled easily and rolled his body round upon his tail so that he leaned upon one elbow before her. With a smoke-stained forefinger he tapped her soft cheek.

"I've done what I agreed to do, Sasha," he said. "You wanted him and you've got him. There he is for you!"

The girl did not withdraw from his caress. Her face, pretty and sullen, seemed to brood discontentedly.

"Well," she said at last, doubtfully, "I'll fetch her. But if she doesn't know him, Botkin——"

She had risen while she spoke and now stood scowling the rest of her half-spoken threat.

"Of course she'll know him!" laughed the Kommissar. "Bring her in and see for yourself!"

The girl walked to the door without replying and went out from the room. The Kommissar heaved himself from the desk and straddled, hands deep in trouser-pockets, in a *déagé* attitude beside it.

"Sit down, Mister Hope; sit down!" he urged. "No need for a lot of damned formality this time! How did you find your friends, the Orlovskys?"

There were chairs handy and the cushioned seats in each

window recess, but Hope remained standing where he was. "Whom has that girl gone to fetch?" he demanded.

While he listened to them speaking, wild thoughts had surged in his brain of Elena, miraculously spared like himself; but upon the heels of them had come the dull assurance of their futility. As she had known that her name would be called, eavesdropping, as it were, upon destiny, so now out of the infinite where truth dwells eternally, there descended upon him the sure knowledge that she would never again answer to a call.

"Who is it?" he repeated. "What have you brought me here for?"

"You'll see," answered the Kommissar. He grinned suddenly. "It would seem that you are a lady-killer, Mister Hope. Once they have seen you they can't forget you. You are a dangerous man."

"You're up to one of your foul tricks," Hope said. "D'you think I don't know it? Some piece of dirty work behind the backs of your masters!"

The Kommissar's roguish eye hardened and his posture became less debonnaire.

"You'll find it profitable to use a little more civility," he said stiffly. "Your tone——"

"Oh, go to hell!" snapped Hope. "D'you think I care? What the devil do you——"

He broke off at the opening of the door. Botkin shrugged contemptuously and turned towards those who entered. Hope answered the shrug with a snort of defiance, turning to look likewise. It was the girl he knew as Sasha, or Sashenka, standing between the parted leaves of the door like a showman, ushering in another person to the room and the spectacle of its contents.

"See; there he is," she was saying.

The newcomer wore a huge wrap of furs that muffled her from the face to the very feet, a royal-looking garment upon which the tinted lights of the windows shifted as she moved as upon a surface of shining metal. It was hugely too big for the figure it clad, making it a mere perambulating bundle. A cap of the same priceless fur surmounted it, so that what there was visible of the wearer showed merely as eyes looking forth like the eyes of an owl in the hollow of a tree. Only feet that kicked in and out below the fringes of the cloak—

large flat feet in coarse boots—definitely indicated that the thing was human.

It bore down upon him, seeming to advance hesitatingly and with circumspection, till it paused half a dozen paces away.

"Well?" demanded Sashenka. "Isn't that he?"

For answer, there was a bubbling among the furs that clarified to an unmistakable giggle. The living creature within the great cocoon raised its head and the big collar of the cloak fell open. Strange eyes wherein the light moved like a staggering flame and a face of blank, unmeaning beauty came to sight.

"O-oh, sister, it is my Englishman; the Englishman that smiled at me! Look at him, sister. Isn't he pretty?"

Hope gasped. He felt as drowning men are said to feel, with his whole past life reeling off before him. This was the idiot girl from the house that stood alone. Four whole days had not elapsed since he had seen her ladling cabbage-soup into her lovely mouth; yet ages seemed to have elapsed since then, ages crowded and hectic with history, and the world to have changed shape and meaning.

"She knows him, you see," the Kommissar said to the other girl. "I told you it would be all right."

Sashenska had come to her sister's side and taken her arm. She looked extraordinarily trim and dainty by contrast with that bale of skins. She wore knee-boots of claret-colour leather and a skirt as brief as a kilt of a deeper tone. She had the kind of prettiness that Kirschner found piquant and left commonplace, and in her gaze, too, there was a suggestion of the other's instability; but there was none of the idiot's perfection of sheer beauty. For the moment, as she lingered by her sister, her manner had a touch of the maternal.

"I told you he was quite well and safe," she said. "And there he is, you see."

She looked across at Hope. "She's been dreaming about you—or something. They haven't been able to do anything with her. You'd better speak to her."

Hope jerked forth a bitter spit of laughter.

"I see," he said. "In my country there was an old superstition about the healing power of a dead man's touch. Here, though, you don't wait till the man's properly dead. You body-snatch him while he's living."

"Hush! Hush!" Sashenka got quickly in front of her sister. "Damn you, don't let her see you looking like that! Do you want her to have a fit? Tell him, Botkin, you fool! Come over here with me, Tanya, and see the funny pictures on the window!"

She led the idiot farther down the room towards one of the alcoves. Botkin came over to Hope.

"You don't know when you're in luck," said the Kommissar. "That lunatic's people have got a notion that there's something supernatural about her, that she sees visions and all that. She's had nightmares about you—dreamed of you with a hole in your head and soldiers throwing you into a trench. Went from one fit to another!"

"Well?" demanded Hope. "What if she did? What's it got to do with me?"

"To do with you?" The Kommissar stared, forgetting his man-about-town manner for the moment. "But, of course, you don't know that the Commission of Foreign Affairs has thrown you overboard—remitted you back to me to deal with! Well, it has; and it rests with me whether you leave her on your feet or in the dead-cart. That's how much it has to do with you, *durak!*"

"Oh, Lord!" Hope cried out in bored impatience. "What's it all about? Where does the other idiot come into all this?"

"I'm telling you, you uncivil brute," protested the Kommissar. "Why don't you listen? They're convinced that if I send you where I ought to—and that's out to the pits—they're convinced that she'll know. She'll see it in dreams. So Sashenka, her sister there, who actually believes all this rot herself, wants me to let you go."

"Where?" put in Hope curtly.

"Where?" repeated the Kommissar. "Why, back to your own country. There's a party leaving at midnight for the Finnish frontier. What's the matter with the man? Don't you *want* to go?"

For Hope's white, bruised face seemed to have turned to stone. That antic devil, the Kommissar, had taken him up to a high place and showed him all the kingdoms and the cities of the world of his desire. His mother's house with its square-walled garden at Hampstead, high above London, where from the window of the bedroom that had been his

since childhood, he could look out over smoke-softened miles of city, with the spires and the factory-chimneys rising from them like masts of ships in harbour ; the heath and its sophisticated dales and hillocks ; the order, the security and comort, the propriety and graciousness of it all ! There, jails were places one read of and death was a thing to be accomplished privately, like birth. Moscow was a fable, fanciful as Lyonesse ; the New Jerusalem was much more real. All his for the taking—his, at the whim of an idiot !

"Well ?" said the Kommissar. "Why don't you answer ?" Hope returned blinking to the present.

"There's one thing," he said. "What about the Orlovskys ? You wouldn't have arrested them but for me."

"Never mind them," said the Kommissar. "You don't take them with you. The Orlovskys have got nothing to do with it."

"Well," said Hope, "you can release them anyhow and I'll stay and look after them. Or I'll go back to that jail and do it."

"You're likely to go somewhere that you won't like, if you keep this up," threatened the Kommissar. "Don't you understand ? I'm telling you that I'll send you home."

"Ye-es !" Hope pondered for some seconds. "Yes, I know you are. Why ?"

"Eh ?"

"Why ? You're not doing a thing like that for nothing. You're getting something out of it. I heard you talking when I came here ; you've made a bargain about me with that girl. I want to know what it is ?"

The Kommissar lowered a furious face to his.

"You mind your own business, curse you ! I'll have you shoved on board that train in irons."

"Not you !" jeered Hope. "That couldn't be kept quiet—a foreigner refusing to be released from your beastly country ! You'd have to answer for embezzling a Soviet prisoner for your private ends, and you know you daren't face it."

"Blast you !" fumed the Kommissar and jerked away from him. "Sasha !" he called. "Sasha ! Just come here for a moment."

The girl rose and came down the room. The fur-swaddled lunatic followed her more slowly, making little grimaces of coyness at Hope.



"Here's a thing for you!" the Kommissar broke out.  
"He won't go!"

"Won't go?"

The girl slewed round and stared at Hope incredulously.

"No! Wants to stay here and be dry-nurse to those old Orlovskys. He'd be snapped up again in an hour, and ten to one I'd be asked about it. Can't have that, you know!"

She puckered her delicate brows in wonder.

"But *why* won't you go?" she asked at length.

"Rather go back to jail," Hope answered shortly. "Those old people need me. It's a question of honour; you wouldn't understand!"

The sting missed her. She walked slowly over to him. Her exquisite little face was serious, with a suggestion of puzzled hurt, as though refusals were new to her.

"It's the child," she said; "it's Tanya! She's queer, you know; and when things go wrong with her, it brings bad luck. Oh, it's true; we've proved it! I've promised her you shall go home free to your own country, and if you don't, she'll know! She'll dream and then she'll have fits. She's terrible when she's like that. You won't disappoint her, will you?"

"Afraid I must!" The voice and the words were those of the old Hope, the diffidently courteous, the sweetly formal; but their effect was a sneering repulse.

She flinched from it, and with a vicious tightening of the lips.

"Because of those Orlovskys?" she cried.

"Yes," he replied. "Because of those Orlovskys!"

She gave him a long look; he could all but see her rat's brain working, groping for an expedient by which to thwart him. Then she turned away and drew the Kommissar to a conference at the corner of the big desk. The idiot was hovering in the offing, making little mewing noises to attract Hope's attention. He turned his back and sat down in the nearest window-seat, watching the whispered debate between Botkin and the girl.

The Russians are one of the gesticulating peoples; they talk with every part of them except their brains. There was a dumb-show drama going on. The girl spoke, nodding and wagging a stiff finger. Botkin considered, shrugged and protruded a dubious upper lip. She stamped an insistent foot; he shook his head gloomily, brightened and spread a

hand that offered a feasible amendment. She stared, incredulous, then both laughed and glanced at Hope. "That'll settle *him*!" they said to each other as plainly as though they had shouted it. But it was not finished. Botkin put both hands on the girl's shoulders, and bent a face that was dark and challenging to hers. He asked a question. She half-turned her head away and nodded rapidly. "You mean it?" demanded his eyebrows and the jut of his chin. A slower nod answered him. He released her; the bargain was confirmed. They passed together to the small door by which, during Hope's previous visit, the little fat secretary had come and gone, and went out.

The idiot had sat herself down on the floor, and mewed and giggled there to herself. Hope sat still; she could do without attention from him, she for whom death was bound or let loose at her imbecile whim.

The Kommissar returned to the room alone, closing the door behind him. He went and sat down at his desk. He was biting on a smile; he wore the look of a man who keeps his countenance with difficulty while a practical joke works up to its climax. For a further evil portent, he had recovered his geniality.

"A cigarette, Mister Hope?"

"No!" said Hope.

The Kommissar raised his eyebrows in deprecation of this grossness and lit a cigarette for himself. A little desk-clock ticked faintly and rapidly, and the idiot fidgeted; save for these, the great room was still. At first the Kommissar gazed at his prisoner with an excellent expression of tolerant amusement; the man's face was the fancy-dress of his foolish mind; but Hope's unwinking eyes—he was gazing beyond the figure of the Kommissar—were uncomfortable to stare at, and he set to examining his polished finger-nails.

Something touched Hope's knee and he looked down with a start. The idiot had crawled close to him and was reaching up a hand towards his. She had something in it and was trying to give it to him as once she had given him the packet of cigarettes.

"For my Englishman!" she crooned. "For my pretty Englishman!"

The Kommissar bent forward. "Take it, man," he urged. "Take it quick! Don't let's have any of her fits here."

She had fumbled it into his hand and now scuttled away along the wall on hands and knees, squeaking with excitement. Hope opened his hand and looked at the gift. He shook his head—Fate was so childish!—and smiled.

"He's laughing! My Englishman is laughing!" crowed the idiot.

She had given him Prince Orlovsky's great gold watch.

Then silence again till at length there sounded the patter of brisk, light feet on the stairs and the double doors parted their lips to admit Sashenka. Glowing with the fresh air, with snow-flakes in her hair and a will-o'-the-wisp flame in her eyes, she went with a step that was half a dance to the Kommissar at the big desk, flinging Hope a grimace as she passed. Dainty enough to dance for the prize of a saint's head on a charger, a morsel worth its price to any gallant Kommissar, she came into that factory of wroug and oppression, smiled to the man-eating mountebank who ruled there, like a figure out of a poet's ecstatic dream—a poet diseased and pervert, but a poet!

She had a paper in her glove; she plucked it out and cast it on the desk before the Kommissar.

"It's done?" he smiled, taking it.

"Of course it's done!" she answered in a voice that trilled.

He was looking at the paper. "But you must sign this, Sasha!"

"Where? Here? Give me a pen."

The Kommissar took the paper from her and dried it on his blotting-pad with a smack of his fist. He rose, holding it.

"Now, Mr. Hope," he said, "you have given trouble enough. Postnik, my secretary, will tell you about the pass, the ticket, and so forth; and to-night you leave us. Yes, I assure you; to-night you leave us—one way or the other—homeward or heavenward! And before you decide in which direction you will travel, you had better cast your eye over this document."

He came round the desk as he spoke and gave the paper to Hope. Then he returned to his place and put a finger on a bell-push. Hope glanced at the document, started violently, and began to read it feverishly.

It was a printed form with spaces filled in with a pen.

"To—so and so," it read. "You are directed to proceed

at once with the execution by"—there followed the written word "shooting"—"of"—and then, in the ample space left for the names, clearly set down—"Vladimir Alexandrovitch Orlovsky and Ekaterina Vasilievna Orlovsky, and to certify to me that this order has been carried out." Then the impression of the official rubber stamp and the Kommissar's signature. And below appeared another line of print: "I certify that the above order has been duly carried out by me."

The ink was still fresh where the girl had signed her name at the bottom. When he looked up, she was laughing at him; the Kommissar's arm was round her waist.

"You see," said Botkin, "all your objections are removed. *Bon voyage*, Mister Hope!"

The secretary was waiting in the door for him to come forth. With hands that groped, like a man blinded, he staggered towards him.

Two o'clock in the morning, and the "midnight" train for Petrograd was just pulling clear of Moscow. The land stretched in silver to either side of the line, shining under a frigid moon. Packed into his compartment, Hope stared through a broken window-pane upon that vastness of desolation. Holy Russia, whose harvests fatten on the blood of martyrs! Who shall redeem it—who?

For Godfrey Hope there limned itself a vision, born of a heart made wise in torment. It shaped itself till it stood great and clear upon the snow-floor of the empty world—a virgin, slim and young, with the face that for ever should be livid to him, weak, brave and enduring patience, folding in compassionate arms an idiot child.



## GUY DE MAUPASSANT

### *The Chairmender*

Guy de Maupassant, the French poet and novelist of the nineteenth century, was a keen observer of life, with a gift of vivid character-drawing, and a simple but effective style. He was the author of some of the most brilliant short stories ever written, and it is on these that his fame is mainly founded.



## THE CHAIRMENDER

**I**T was towards the end of a dinner-party, given by the Marquis de Bertran to celebrate the opening of the shooting season. Eleven sportsmen, eight young women and the local doctor were seated around the brilliantly lighted table, which was decked with fruit and flowers.

The conversation turned on love, and a heated discussion arose on the eternal question whether one could truly love many times or once only. Instances were given of some who had never seriously loved but once, and instances of others who had loved often and vehemently. On the whole, the men affirmed that this passion could, like a disease, attack the same person again and again, and even prove fatal, if hindered in its course. Although this view could not be disproved, the ladies, who based their opinion on poetic fancies rather than observation, held that love, true love, heroic love, could visit a human being once only ; that such love as this was like a thunderbolt, and that a heart that had once experienced it was ever afterwards so utterly devastated, ravaged and consumed, that no other strong passion, or even passing fancy, could strike root there again. The Marquis, a man of many love affairs, warmly contested this theory.

“ I assure you that one can love time after time with all one’s strength, with all one’s soul. You quote instances of people who have killed themselves for love, as a proof of the impossibility of a second passion. But my answer to that is, that if they had not been so foolish as to kill themselves, a step which deprived them of all possibility of another attack, they would have recovered from the first seizure, and they would have begun again, and yet again, to the end of their days. Lovers are like drunkards. A man who has drunk will drink again, and a man who has loved will love again. It is entirely a question of temperament.”

They referred the dispute to the doctor, who had retired to the country after practising in Paris. They begged him to give his opinion. He had, however, no settled convictions :



"As the Marquis says, it is a question of temperament. But I do know one case of a passion which endured for fifty-five years, without a day's intermission, and ended only with death."

The Marchioness clapped her hands.

"How beautiful! What a perfect dream to be loved like that! What bliss to live, for fifty-five years, the object of such frantic and absorbing affection! How happy, how exquisitely content with life this man must have been, who inspired such adoration!"

The doctor smiled:

"You are right on one point, Madam. As you have guessed, the object of this devotion was a man. You know him: it was Monsieur Chouquet, the local chemist. And you knew the woman, too, the old chairmender who used to come every year to the manor house. But I will tell you the story in detail."

The ladies' enthusiasm suffered a sudden collapse. They had a look of disgust on their faces, as if they felt that love should confine itself to persons of refinement and distinction, for in them only could people of quality take a real interest.

"Three months ago," resumed the doctor, "I was summoned to that old woman's death-bed. She had arrived here the day before in the van, which served her for home and which was drawn by the old screw you have all seen. Her two big black dogs, her friends and protectors, were with her. The priest was already by her side. She appointed us executors of her will and in order to make her last wishes clear to us she told us the whole story of her life. I have never heard anything more singular or more poignant.

"Her father and mother were chairmenders and she had never lived in a proper house. As a little thing she roamed about, ragged, dirty and squalid. The family used to halt on the outskirts of villages by the roadside, take the horse out of the van and turn it loose to graze. The dog would curl up and go to sleep, his head on his paws, and the child would tumble about on the grass, while her parents, seated in the shadow of the wayside elms, patched up all the old chairs in the parish. Few words were wasted in that abode on wheels. After a brief discussion as to who should make the round of the houses, uttering the familiar cry, 'Chairs to mend,' they set to work to plait the straw, seated opposite each other, or side by side. If

the child wandered too far or tried to make friends with some village urchin, her father's angry voice recalled her :

"Come here at once, you little blackguard !"

"These were the only words of affection she ever heard. As she grew bigger she was sent round to collect chairs that required mending. Presently, in her wanderings, she began to scrape acquaintance with other youngsters. But now it was the parents of her new friends who roughly called their children away :

"Come here at once, you young scamp. Don't let me catch you talking to vagabonds."

"Small boys would often throw stones at her. Ladies sometimes gave her coppers, which she hoarded carefully.

"One day, when she was eleven years old, the family came to this neighbourhood. At the back of the cemetery she saw young Chouquet, crying because a playfellow had robbed him of a couple of farthings. The little outcast was greatly perturbed by the tears of this small townsman. Her childish mind had supposed that children of his class were always happy and content. She went up to him, and on learning the cause of his trouble, she poured into his hands all her savings, seven sous, which he took as a matter of course, wiping away his tears. Such was her ecstasy of joy, that she actually ventured to kiss him. As he was absorbed in the contemplation of the coins, he made no objection. Seeing that he did not shake her off or strike her, she threw her arms round him and kissed him passionately. Then she ran away.

"What was the idea in that poor little head ? What was the bond that linked her to that other child ? Was it because she had sacrificed to him her whole pitiful little fortune, or because she had given him her first kiss of love ? The mystery is one and the same, for children as for grown-ups.

"For months she dreamed of that corner of the cemetery and of that small boy. In the hope of seeing him again, she robbed her parents, pocketing a sou here and there out of sums given her in payment, or entrusted to her for buying food.

"Next time she came, she had two francs in her pocket. But she merely caught a glimpse of the youngster, looking very spick and span, as she glanced through the windows of his father's drug shop, peering between a big red bottle and a tape-worm in spirits. Dazzled and entranced by the resplendent

glory of the coloured water, by the glamour of the glittering phials, she loved him all the more. The memory of him never faded from her mind. Next year when she came upon him behind the school, playing marbles with his comrades, she flung herself upon him, clasped him in her arms, and kissed him with such violence that he began to scream with terror. To soothe him, she gave him all the money she had, a veritable fortune, three francs and four sous, at which he stared with wide open eyes. He accepted the money and allowed her to kiss him as much as she pleased.

"For the next four years she poured into his hands all her savings, which he pocketed, conceding kisses as a fair exchange. Once it was thirty sous, once two francs, another time twelve sous—and over this she shed tears of pain and humiliation, but it had been a bad year—finally five francs, a large round coin, which made him laugh for joy.

"He occupied all her thoughts, and he himself awaited her return with a certain impatience, and would come running to her, as soon as he saw her, in a way that made her heart leap with happiness.

"Then he disappeared. He had been sent to school, as she ascertained by skilful questioning. With infinite adroitness, she tried to induce her parents to change the order of their rounds, so that their visits should coincide with the vacations. At last she was successful, but it had cost her a whole year's scheming. Thus two years had elapsed without her seeing him, and she hardly recognized him, he had changed so much. He had grown and had improved in looks, and he was very impressive in a jacket with gold buttons. He pretended not to see her and passed by with his head in the air. She cried for two days, and this was the beginning of sufferings that never ended.

"Every year she came back. She passed him in the street without daring to greet him, while he did not deign even to glance at her. She loved him to distraction.

"‘Doctor,’ she said to me, ‘he is the only man I have ever had eyes for in the whole world. I hardly know if the others even exist.’

"After her parents' death she carried on their trade, but she now kept two dogs, instead of one, ferocious brutes whom no one would have dared to tackle. One day when she returned to the little town where she had left her heart she saw a young

woman coming out of the chemist's shop, leaning on Chouquet's arm. It was his wife. He was married.

"That evening she threw herself into the pond near the Town Hall. A belated reveller fished her out and carried her to the chemist's. Young Chouquet came down in his dressing-gown to attend to her and, without giving any sign of recognition, took off her clothes, and rubbed her, and said severely :

" ' You must have been mad. What a silly thing to do ! ' "

"That was enough to restore her. He had spoken to her ; it kept her happy for a long time. He declined to accept any remuneration for his services, though she vehemently pressed payment upon him.

"And thus her whole life slipped away. She sat at her chairmending thinking all the while of Chouquet. Every year she saw him through the windows of his shop. She took to buying from him a stock of simple remedies. In this way she saw him close to, spoke to him, and gave him money as in the old days.

"As I told you before, she died this spring. After relating this pathetic story, she begged me to make over to the man whom she had so faithfully loved, her whole savings of a lifetime. She had worked only for him, she said, even going hungry to add to her hoard, so as to make sure that he would think of her at least once more when she was dead. She then gave me two thousand three hundred and twenty-seven francs. The odd twenty-seven francs I left with the priest for funeral expenses, the rest I took away with me as soon as she had breathed her last.

"Next day I went to see the Chouquets. They were seated opposite each other, finishing their luncheon, a fat, red-faced couple, redolent of the drugs they sold, consequential and pleased with life. They invited me to sit down and offered me a liqueur, which I accepted. Then in a voice quivering with emotion I began my story, expecting to move them to tears.

"But as soon as he understood that he had been beloved by that strolling vagabond of a chairmender, Chouquet jumped out of his seat with rage. It was as if she had stolen from him his good name, the esteem of respectable folk, his personal honour, some subtle refinement, which he valued more than life itself. Equally disgusted, his wife could find nothing to say but :

“ ‘That old beggar woman ! That old beggar woman !’

“ Chouquet was stamping round the table, his skull-cap askew over one ear.

“ ‘Did you ever hear the like, Doctor,’ he broke out. ‘What a horrible business this is ! What on earth am I to do ? If I had known this when she was alive I would have had her taken up and sent to jail. And there she should have stayed, I promise you.’

“ I was thunderstruck at the result of my well-intended effort, and at a loss as to what to say or do. But I had to fulfil my mission. I resumed :

“ ‘She bade me make over to you her savings, amounting to two thousand three hundred francs. But as the story I have told you seems to displease you so much, perhaps this money had better be given to the poor.’

“ Speechless with surprise, the pair of them stared at me. I took the money from my pockets, a sordid collection of coins of all countries and mintages, gold and copper mixed together, and I asked :

“ ‘What do you think about it ?’

“ Madame Chouquet was the first to find words.

“ ‘Well, since it was the woman’s last wish . . . I think we can hardly refuse.’

“ Her husband added, rather shamefacedly :

“ ‘We can always spend it on something for the children.’

“ ‘Just as you please,’ I said drily.

“ ‘Very well,’ he replied, ‘as she asked you to, you had better hand it over. We shall find an opportunity of spending it on some deserving object.’

“ I made over the money, bowed and took my departure.

“ Next day Chouquet came to me and said abruptly :

“ ‘I see . . . that woman has left her van here. What are you going to do with it ?’

“ ‘Nothing. Take it if you like.’

“ ‘Capital. It’s just what I wanted for a shed for my kitchen garden.’

“ As he was going away, I called him back.

“ ‘She has also left her old horse and her two dogs. Do you want them, too ?’

“ He stood still in surprise.

“ ‘Good Lord, no. What earthly use would they be to me ? Do what you like with them.’

"He laughed and we shook hands. After all, in a country place, doctor and chemist must remain friends.

"I have kept the dogs. The priest, who has a large courtyard, has the horse. The van is used by Chouquet as a shed, and with the money he has bought five shares in a railway company.

"That is the only instance of perfect love I have ever known."

The doctor fell silent. The Marchioness, with tears in her eyes, sighed :

"That proves it. It is only women who know how to love."



BERTA RUCK

*The Fan Dancer*

Berta Ruck was intended for an artistic career and studied at the Slade School and in Paris. She abandoned art for literature, and has written a large number of popular novels, including *His Official Fiancée*, *The Lap o' Luxury* and *This Year, Next Year*. Her husband, Oliver Onions, is also a well-known novelist.





## THE FAN DANCER

PERHAPS you saw *The Fan Dancer*, exhibited in the Paris Salon by the young American portrait painter Rickman Davis?

His picture of a girl, holding up behind her head a vast, scarlet feather fan, of which her body seemed the ivory handle, was the talk of the Exhibition; partly because of the vital masterly painting of the thing, partly because that canvas was known to have been bought at sight by Monsieur Bertin, the famous Director of the famous Music Hall where that dancer was engaged.

The picture, later, became illustration to a story that startled all Paris; this is the story. . . .

It was after the Interval.

"Treize. CONSUELO, *Danse d'Éventail*," announced the programme.

Up jumped the big golden "13" to left and right of the stage, the orchestra crooned a prelude, and—"This," whispered those who had already seen the show to those who had not, "is the evening's best number."

Curtains of glittering gold tissue slid back from inner velvet curtains; these rose, showing the stage as an empty casket; intriguing, dim. Down came the conductor's baton. Up swooped the music's crescendo. The stage lightened, to show a "set" of waving palm leaf fans. . . .

Centre-back, two of the fans half parted. Behind them appeared a gleam, a glow of red, as though something in the wings had caught fire; a glimpse of flame, licking, vanishing, leaping.

Chord! Forth shot the flame, revealed as a long, furled, plummy fan. Out peeped a coral-white foot. Out, a slender coral-white limb, a white, dancer's-shape latticed in scarlet fringe, a red-casqued head, a small audacious face.

"*Consuelo!*"

Black eyes and white teeth gleamed out in answer to

applause as the dancer took the pose of her portrait ; straight, ivory handle to fan unfurled in a semi-circle behind her.

"Ah, precisely as in your picture," exclaimed little Madame Bertin, the Director's eighteen-year-old wife, who was sitting between her husband who had bought, and the young artist who had painted, *The Fan Dancer* ; over the ledge of the stage-box the little lady leant eagerly forward, for this was her first time of seeing something of which she had heard so much.

A laughing melody caught Consuelo out of her picture-pose ; took her and whirled her into her dance ; and breathlessly her audience watched the lovely masterpiece of effortless ease. Consuelo's slim flame of a body measured not five-foot-two from head to toes ; but it moved, leapt, twirled as though that feather fan (four feet from scarlet tip to end of tortoiseshell sticks) were part of herself. Sail to slender ivory mast ! Corolla to slim white flower-pistil ! Consuelo danced ; and, all bewitched, the cosmopolitan house followed each movement swift as a leaping fire. Not a cough, not a whisper, not a rustled programme in all those packed seats. Spell-bound, those who had not before seen her Fan Dance. Spell-bound, also, those who had come to see it again. For never had Consuelo, artist to the tips of her toes, trained to the uttermost capacity, danced with this fiery, finished, breath-taking grace, danced so like a thing inspired.

The reason you have, of course, guessed ? Consuelo was madly, divinely, exultantly in love, and dancing to please the man she loved ; the man sitting up there in the stage-box, the only man who had been kind to Consuelo.

She, being desirable, knew most moods of desirous man. Urgently-beseeching, savagely-jealous, hectoring, servile. But not until she met the painter, Rick Davis, had this dancing-girl guessed that a man could be gentle as he was strong. That first morning in Rick's chaotic studio on the Left Bank, when he had shown concern for his model's comfort (Would she be able to keep that pose now ? Sure ? Fan not too heavy ? No draught there ?) had enthroned him in the heart of a temperamental little vagabond. Upon the unconscious Rick, Consuelo had poured out all the passion that was in her. The sittings for *The Fan Dancer* had meant bliss ; misery when he'd finished it, and she had not seen him, either in

or out of the theatre, for black empty weeks ! Now here he was ; big, reassuring, wholesome, framed in the gilded garlands of the *loge* just above the stage. Upon her she felt the blue and boyish eyes that sent the hot blood racing through her veins. More, just before she came on, a note had been sent round to tell her that Rick would come up to her dressing-room to have a talk with her immediately after her turn.

*Coming to see me ? To talk to me ? To say he loves me ?*

That was the music to which there leapt about the stage that white-and-scarlet flame.

Turn, please ; watch the stage-box. Look into another pair of eyes ; big, wistful, and like those of some child who has been horribly frightened and hurt, who cannot forget that hurt, who is still frightened. Those are the eyes of little Madame Bertin, who wears the finest pearls in the theatre about her eighteen-year-old collar-bones, who is altogether beautifully dressed, coiffed, and brought up, and who was married last year, straight from her Convent School, to the portly Director who might have been her grandfather.

Beside her, Monsieur Bertin would appear a mere mountain of well-tailored, well-fed, good nature . . . until you shift your glance from his wife's eyes to his. Ah ! Something about those small piercing eyes in that large face makes a woman recoil . . . They too are intent, now, upon the dancer.

Backwards and down towards the stage, as it were under the weight of the fan ! Sinking as the music sinks ! And still the fan bore down upon the Fan Dancer, softly, relentlessly, like a scarlet sunset-cloud.

Still Consuelo danced for Rick, of whom she had been so unsure. To-night he was coming round ! To-night he had " something to say " ! No wonder her dance was inspired . . .

Softly, softly, each tiny movement the perfection of grace, she sank level with the stage. She lay, back to the boards, her slender limbs folding beneath her. In her mind the thought leapt that she would not wish to go on living, unless to-night Rick told her that he loved her. Otherwise, there would be nothing Consuelo wanted, except . . . The great fan descended : it was a scarlet shroud covering every vestige of that fair little dancer's shape.

Through the house breathed a long soft sigh, heralding the hail of applause . . .

"Great, isn't she?" muttered the boyish artist.

"*Ab! très bien, t-r-rès bien!*" agreed Bertin the Director, in whose large face the eyes narrowed, covetously. That slim form and pert face of Consuelo the dancer were not yet his own, but he had watched them as a huge black tom-cat watches before he pounces on a little white mouse.

Now this game Bertin had played with many young graceful girls; watching, pouncing, making what he would of them, letting them go. A crueller game had been played with one girl. He had watched her dewy innocence, pounced . . . had not let her go. Had, indeed, married her. . . .

Little Madame Bertin, almost forgetting Life in Art that had, mimicked tragedy, whispered as he gazed down at the stage, "One would say Death?"

Whereat her husband, crossing one great knee over the other, laid his hand on his wife's slight shoulder without sensing the shudder that shook it, craned further forward to stare at the still soft crumple of scarlet on the stage, and gave a short laugh.

"Death? Of Consuelo? Watch. The rogue has another trick up her sleeve; if she had a sleeve."

Suddenly, from the heap of feathers at the spot where they buried the dancer's face, there rose softly in the air what seemed a puff of scarlet smoke. Consuelo was blowing softly upwards, blowing the downy feathers away from her red mouth, while a ripple of laughter from the house met the gesture.

The music changed. Like a great sea anemone giving glimpses of a sea-nymph, the fan moved, waved, rose. Out gleamed the latticed body; in one supple movement the Fan Dancer was on her feet. Swaying, the plumes swayed with her; she bent, she curtsied. The curtain fell, the house rose . . . and presently the man whom Consuelo loved left the stage-box to make his way round to the dancer's dressing-room.

Consuelo, having caught about her a green kimono, streaky with wet-white, sent away her *habilleuse*, and stood breathlessly waiting beside her dressing-table—which was the usual mess of make-up and mascots. Alfred the Penguin was inevitably there, with horseshoes, black kittens, and other luck charms of every nationality, from a bunch of

Scottish heather, once white, to the thin bright dagger incised with a Spanish phrase, which, being interpreted, meant "*Trust me, before a man.*"

This was the offering of an art-encouraging English Duchess, at whose historic house Consuelo had danced, and who had mistaken the Fan Dancer for a Spaniard, not only because of her name, but because of "those wonderful black eyes that seemed to say she would kill for the sake of the man she loved." Rather a shock for Her Grace when she first heard her little protégée's voice raised in her native speech? Listen to it now as she turns in happy excitement to her dressing-room door, and greets the man she loves with an "'Ullo, Rickie! Quite a stranger, arntcher?"

Purest Cockney. Consuelo had toured Europe since she was thirteen, but her real name was Florrie Simmons, and she was a flower of the London slums.

"Fine to see you again," beamed Rick, with a grin like opening the piano. "You surely got them to-night. I've not just made up my mind about that cunning touch at the end where you lift the feather with your sigh; that's Vaudeville. The other's honest-to-God Art. Anyway, you were great, little girl!"

Warm appreciation in his voice; but light chill in the expectant heart under Consuelo's splashed wrap. It was for something more that she waited. . . .

Plenty of men she had kissed, giving her pretty mouth with no more ado than another type of girl gives a handshake. Plenty of men too had crawled at her small feet, begging that favour.

"And Rick's never so much as kissed my fingers," she thought. "Why? Might be a good sign? You never know! If he did kiss me, though . . . if he *did*, it'd just about settle things. Just by the way Rick did it like, and without him saying a word, I should know."

She looked up at him. He answered that tense look with an inquiring glance. She cleared her throat.

"Thanks for all these compliments, I'm sure," she uttered lightly; but it was with an effort which no one could have guessed that the little theatre-girl lifted her face in invitation.

"Say, that's mighty nice of you!" exclaimed young Rick, and he caught her by the shoulders, bent his head and gave her on both cheeks the hearty kiss of an affectionate brother.

Then Consuelo knew. No good. All up. Not a hope, not a hope ! Chill, in her heart, turned to ice. She knew, now.

There was an instant's pause. She swept a soft heap of flimsies off the chair in the corner. "Take a pew, Rick ?"

"Thanks."

Another tiny silence, in which Consuelo had time to tell herself, "What you feel now, my lady, is numb, like when you've been bashed over the 'ead. Bimeby you'll come to, and that'll hurt like hell. You be a woman and don't you let him notice nothing. 'Ave a spot of pride ! Anyhow," the conviction suddenly struck her, "something's been hurting *him*."

For she had looked at his wholesome blond face . . . with a difference in it ; looked into his blue boy's-eyes . . . with a change in them ; and she trifled her own anguish to ask with casual friendliness :

"What's the trouble, Rickie ? Not hard-up ?"

"I should say not. Thanks to you, I've passed the hard-up line ; that money for *The Fan Dancer* would have kept me going for quite a while, but the commissions I've got on it are starting to pour in, now. It's because I've been rushed over those that I haven't got round to call on any of my friends ; you'll have to forgive me."

This apology Consuelo waved aside, small hand holding big puff, with which she was unnecessarily repowdering her throat.

"I've a stunning thing to do of the Folly Sisters in their Collie Number. Other days I'm working on a portrait of Madame Bertin——"

"*Ab !*" At the tone in which Rick pronounced this name, something woke, throbbed, stabbed, in Consuelo's heart.

Quickened senses of a woman in love caught her back to that which she had only subconsciously noted during her dance. Sitting in the stage-box, between old Jumbo Bertin, and Rick. Costly frock ; pearls. Slight white fore-arms on the velvet ledge. Baby mouth, big miserable eyes of another girl.

So that was it ? Oh, yes. Consuelo saw.

"Aha ! Painting the Director's wife ? Good for you, Rickie. Hope Jumbo's being made to pay through the nose for it ?"

"Twenty thousand francs more than I got for *The Fan Dancer*."

"Some people's never satisfied! With all this run of luck, you feel——" She bit the soft insides of her lips to keep her voice lightly steady. "You feel as if something had taken the kick out of your life?"

Rick paused with a match half-way to his cigarette. "Why, girl! whatever makes you think——"

"I don't think. I know. For a fellow like you, Rick, only two things can take the kick out of life. Since money's not the trouble, love is."

"You've certainly got imagination! What makes you fancy——"

"Love is!" the Fan Dancer cried sharply. "Don't lie to me, Rickie. Aren't we pals? Haven't I told you heaps? Even . . . even my real name being 'Florrie,' and that? Come on, boy; tell me. I'm right?"

The big fellow dropped his fair head. Then, raising it, he turned on his little friend, most honest, trustful, most unhappy eyes, and said: "You're right, I guess."

"You're just crazy about—her you're painting now?"

Rick nodded. Presently, just as a big brother confides in a favourite sister, he strove to describe the woman he loved to the woman who loved him.

"Consuelo! She—she's the sweetest ever. So shy. So sort of . . . exquisite. Everything a man dreams of when he's a boy starting to grow up. . . . She's all different from any other girl I've struck. Made to be loved. . . ."

"Wasn't any girl?" muttered Consuelo; a question lost, for, from below in the theatre rose the softened blare of the orchestra, the softened gale of laughter over the antics of a troupe of Japanese dwarf acrobats.

"*She* doesn't fit in with this theatrical crowd," went on Rick, staring at a row of little dancing shoes he did not see any more than he saw the look on the dancer's face. "A home, kids, a man to worship the ground she walks on; those would make her happy."

The widening of Consuelo's black eyes asked, "Wouldn't they make any of us happy?"

"And then she . . . difficult to tell you. At seventeen. . . . It's the way still with some of these French young girls! . . . She was taken straight out of her convent and married



off without knowing a thing of what it meant. Just handed over to Bertin by her mother."

"Her mother," retorted the Cockney lass, "ought to have got ten years!"

"It's worse than prison for the girl. It's hell!"

"She tell you that, Rick?"

"She's never told me a thing. How can a man help knowing?"

"Old Bertin neglect her?"

With great bitterness young Rick replied. "I once heard a fellow say, 'Bertin doesn't neglect any pretty young woman—not even his wife. It might be kinder if he did.' That about gives it, Consuelo?"

Consuelo, spraying chypre on a handkerchief already saturated, nodded.

"Lord knows I'm no saint, but plenty of times Bertin's talk is more than a man can stand. . . . Personally I'd not want to know him if it weren't for . . . Wish to God I'd never set foot in his house. Times, I make up my mind to chuck it all. 'It's spoiling my life,' I think. 'I'll cut it out.' Then it's too strong for me. I can't keep away. Can't. Don't care to *live* if I'm not seeing her. Can you understand that feeling, kid?"

The girl who twisted that handkerchief between her fingers said she thought she could.

"Sympathetic little soul, aren't you? Sorry to inflict all this sob-stuff. . . . Had to pour it out to somebody who'd understand. That's why I came round to you to-night. . . ."

"That was it, was it? Well! you're welcome to anything I can do for you," said she (thinking 'What's the good of *words*?'). Just tell me one other thing, Rickie. She—does she care the same way about you?"

"There hasn't been a word or a look of that sort between us," said honest-eyed Rick. "And yet! Yet, though I've no reason, mind you, I've sometimes wondered. . . . When she saw your picture she was awful keen to know all about *you*, and if we were friends?"

"Was she? Don't you worry to go on 'wondering' no more, then," retorted Consuelo, with a husky laugh, and dropped the twisted hankerchief as an excuse to stoop and hide her face before she went on. "*She* cares. You take my word for that. And, look here, Rickie! Why

don't you take that poor girl away from her hell of a life and *let* her be happy? Straight and above-board, I mean. You make a clean bolt of it. Then you can marry and——”

“Marry?” repeated Rickman Davis hopelessly. Unseeingly he stared over the Fan Dancer's shoulder at the big calico bag which shrouded her furled fan. “Marry? She wouldn't think of it, Florrie, my dear. You forget. She's a Frenchwoman. She's a good Catholic. Divorce doesn't exist for her. There's only one thing on earth that could set her free. Her death—or his.”

“And how old is that Bertin?”

“Fifty-eight and as sound as a bell, blast him! I guess,” said Rick heavily, “that his death is the less likely proposition. You've only got to look at the brute.”

Consuelo looked at the brute.

Appraisingly she looked at him (this was on the evening after her talk with Rick) over champagne-glasses at a secluded table at “The Ox on the Roof,” where for the first time she had been dined by Monsieur Bertin.

Up to that evening she had regarded the Jumbo-Bertin type with philosophy learnt in the country and the life around her; shrugging her shoulders, and agreeing with her colleagues—“Luck, that the patron interests himself in you!” She had taken from the type dinners and presents, giving in return the nonchalant smiles, the exotic English chatter, even the careless kisses of her red lips.

But now no more. . . .

She looked at the brute, and while she seemed to be listening to his after-dinner amiabilities, she thought, “Nothing so bad it couldn't be worse, as they say. To be crazy about Rick without the chance of getting him is hell enough, for me *and* that other poor girl. But imagine being tied up to *this* for the next ten, fifteen, twenty years! My Gord!

“And not a thing to be done about it,” fretted the real girl behind the artificial smile with which she responded to the Director's suave murmurs.

Came the childish impulsive thought that there was something after all she might do. She might get a bit of Rick's own back for him. Here was this other man who wanted her; couldn't she lead 'im up the garden path, round on 'im and hand 'im a nasty one for 'imself?

But it was the motive that made Consuelo accept with

a more roguish smile the Frenchman's suggestion that the Quarter was too full of wicked Apaches to let a *petite* girl find her way back alone to the theatre, even in his car.

And her Fan Dance? That did not come on till after the Performing Dogs, after the Interval? Might he not have the pleasure of sitting in her *loge* while she made her toilette—*Oh, bien entendu!* behind the screen, of course—while she dressed for her number?

"*Onch'ntay, Monsieur Director!*" declared Consuelo.

To lead the brute on, and then turn him down with a bang, and never mind what happened to her job, nothing mattered now, was Consuelo's mood. Only such a desperate, pitifully girlish little bit of revenge the stormy-hearted loyal vagabond meant to take on the man whose bulk filled the corner that had been occupied by Rick last night, and who now watched her, watched her like a black tom-cat watching a mouse. . . .

So unexpectedly, quickly he pounced!

The door had scarcely closed behind the discreetly smiling *habilleuse*, before he'd risen, lunged across the dressing-room, caught that coveted form into his arms, breathed into that face a hot cloud of wine fumes and cigar-smoke and lustful words. At his touch something went snap in Consuelo, and all her slender supple youth blazed into hatred of That which made women recoil on meeting the eyes of little Madame Bertin's husband. It happened in less than a minute; the pounce, the recoil, Consuelo's "Let me go, you beast!" stifled as Bertin pressed her backwards against her littered dressing-table and reached for her lips.

A name broke from them; a soft panted "Rickie!" Then the mad resolution took the Cockney girl whose blood was up. "Rickey, I will! I'll fix 'im for you——"

As she writhed in Bertin's grip, one slenderly muscular white arm shot out behind her. Blindly it groped for something on her dressing-table, found and snatched up that thin blade of the Spanish dagger. Wildly she thrust it through broadcloth, silk, and flesh; got him between two vertebrae which, touched, would mean paralysis; which, severed, meant what came upon him before he knew. There was a sobbing gasp from her, the smothered grunt of a pole-axed ox from him. Then Bertin fell, crashing forward like a

falling chimney, bringing the girl down with him on to the dressing-room floor.

Shuddering, panting, dragging herself from under that bulk, Consuelo struggled up again to her feet. For one instant she stood, still clutching that knife on which Bertin's blood clogged the motto *Trust me, before a man*. Panting, she looked down at her work, that inert mass which had twitched, once, and was still.

"There!" gasped Consuelo aloud.

A tap at her door. Her call.

Graceful as Salome posturing before the King, Consuelo took the stage, unfurled and spread her giant fan, and danced.

Brilliantly she smiled at her enchanted audience, but with each fluent step she took, those great black eyes of hers were seeing neither the stage nor the house.

They were seeing the gross body of a man lying face downwards and lifeless on her dressing-room floor, the back of his well-cut coat torn, soaked, and darkly stained. On that sight Consuelo had locked the dressing-room door. Until she ran up again, no one would enter the dressing-room where it would be taken for granted that M. Bertin was waiting for his latest flame.

Dancing, she thought, "Funny to think of all those people over there, never dreaming this is my last appearance on this or any stage."

There rose before her eyes other hideous pictures of a crowded court-house . . . a cell . . . a grim morning sky . . . a scaffold.

Ignorant of the law of *crime passionnelle*, of the unlikelihood that any French jury would in the circumstances convict her, the little vagabond thought, "I suppose even if I am English, it's here they'd get me, because that brute was French. Murder. Guilty, my lord! and a blinking good job. Even if I 'ave to swing for it! Who wants to go on living? But they don't 'ang 'em 'ere. It'd be me for the guillotine. Br-r-r."

Fronds of her blood-red feathers drifted across Consuelo's throat as the end of the dance sent her bending backwards, backwards, the half-furled fan sinking with her. The limes caught the light tortoiseshell sticks, and there was a gleam of sudden piercing brilliance.

"Diamonds on her fan!" whispered a woman in the

audience ; but it was not the blink of diamonds, it was the gleam of steel.

Sinking backwards, Consuelo saw another vision. Not that of the great knife with the semi-circular *lunette*. She saw the blond wholesome face of Rick, and close beside it appeared the gentle girlishness of little Madame Bertin, from whose gaze all misery had melted into a great and radiant happiness.

"It'll be all right for *them*, now. . . . Maybe, if they do have a kiiddie, they'll call it Florrie. Rick," she whispered, "I'd *like* that ! "

Eyes of the house were upon her finish, as there collapsed to the boards that soft scarlet heap which was a girl's body covered by a fan. Every movement had been the poetry of motion ; but now came one swift resolute gesture which, screened by the feathers, the house did not see. It was the driving home of icicle-bright steel into blossom-white flesh. One last quiver, then still ; still, for longer than last night, lay the scarlet heap in the centre of the stage.

"Now you watch her," said a lad in the gallery to his sweetheart. "See her blow the feathers from in front of her mouth ; that's what she does next."

The house watched for that playful gesture that finished the Fan Dance.

Not to-night ? Not for any night any more. Still as Death lay the feathery heap, and no plume of it rose fluttering to the soft breath of a girl's sigh.

Only slowly, slowly from the dancer's breast there curled underneath the fan and down over the stage a slender trickle—blood-red.

## DENIS MACKAIL

### *Pym's Party*

Denis Mackail comes of an artistic and literary family, being the son of a former Professor of Poetry at Oxford and grandson of Burne-Jones. His books are noted for their amusing and lifelike delineation of character, and the most popular of them are probably *Bill the Bachelor*, *The Flower Show* and *Greenery Street*.



## PYM'S PARTY

HER full name was Pamela Yates-Mannering, but she signed her work with her initials, and everybody called her "Pym." Young women who have studied at the Slade and illustrate magazine stories, while waiting for the world to recognize their genius in even higher forms of art, aren't always, or necessarily, good-looking. Quite a lot of them take considerable pains to make the worst of themselves, and if they're happier that way, then it certainly isn't for us to interfere. There are others who, taking no pains at all, yet triumphantly achieve the same object. There are—descending still lower—the women artists who wear men's hats and collars.

But Pym was in none of these classes. She took no particular pains with her appearance, but her appearance had taken enormous pains with itself. Even in a painter's overall her figure was a thing of beauty; even with a smudge of Indian ink on the end of it, her nose proclaimed its enchanting outline; even when she borrowed a pair of men's riding-boots (from the second-hand shop at the end of the street) and stepped into them to draw their reflection for a hunting story, her ankles seemed to treat them like glass slippers.

Moreover, and as if all this weren't quite enough, Pym had a heart of gold. Everybody liked her, and she liked everybody. And altogether, if only she'd been able to draw a little better—But there; why must we keep looking for perfection in a world where it so obviously doesn't exist? Let us repeat that Pym was beautiful and kind, and if art editors couldn't be content with that, then there is quite clearly no pleasing them.

Many people, of course, say there's no pleasing them anyhow. But that's rather wandering from the point.

This would be the third Christmas that Pym would have spent in her Chelsea attic, and she had sent out the invitations for her third Christmas-Eve party as long ago as the beginning of December. She'd written them out herself on postcards—



Pym's lettering really was rather good—and they looked like this :

Please come to Pym's Party  
Christmas Eve. 7.30 for Half-past Seven.  
At the Pink Pelican.  
And afterwards at Pym's Palace.  
*R.S.V.P. and Sauve Qui Peut.*

Though admittedly unconventional in form, this summons requires hardly any explanation once you realize that the Pink Pelican is a restaurant (*Table d'Hôte* dinner, one and three-pence) and not a public house. Pym's Palace is, of course, an alliterative way of saying Pym's Attic, and means precisely the same thing. While as for *Sauve Qui Peut*—well, perhaps that does need a little explaining.

The words are supposed to have been used by the French at the Battle of Waterloo—though it is more than likely that what they actually said was something much worse. "Each for himself" is a free translation, but in Pym's set the phrase signified not only "Each guest will pay for himself or herself," but also, with a delicate play on the word *sauve*, "Each guest is at liberty to order himself or herself as cheap a dinner as the state of his or her exchequer dictates."

An economical phrase coined by a necessarily economical set.

And please don't think Pym inhospitable. It is the custom of the country to give parties like this, and any other kind of party would fill the guests with embarrassment and horror—knowing, as they all do, that none of them has a bean. Besides, one can't possibly feed anything up to sixteen ravenous friends in an attic where there is only just space—and not nearly enough chairs—for them all to sit down, and where the kitchen range is represented by a gas-cooker out on the landing.

And, besides again, there will be nothing stingy or restrained about the second half of the programme. For one night Pym's Attic will indeed be Pym's Palace. There will be drinks of all kinds, there will be cakes and raisins and cigarettes and oranges and lashings of coffee and chocolates and crackers and sandwiches and bananas. There will be sports and pastimes. There will even, it is more than likely, be dancing—of a sort—to Pym's gramophone.

There will undoubtedly be dramatic representations, which—as the whole country knows—are extraordinarily bad for the furniture.

And subsequently—that is, if this third Christmas party is anything like its two predecessors—there will be a period of from a month to six weeks, while the hostess goes without all the things that she'd wanted to buy in the Sales, so that she can pay for this lavish entertainment.

So call her unbusinesslike, if you choose ; call her foolish, improvident and unpractical ; but, once more, please don't question her hospitality.

Pym's Set are all dedicated to the arts. They paint, write, draw, design, sculp and sit. They cultivate a slight eccentricity of appearance, a more than bowing acquaintance with the local pawnbrokers, a light-hearted garrulity on the subject of themselves and their work, and—it goes without saying—deep devotion to Pym. In twenty years from now it is more than probable that you will have heard of some of them, but just at present none of them are worrying about that. Inhabitants of the country who openly pursue Dame Fortune do not thrive in this Set, nor those who show any outward sign of taking themselves seriously. In Pym's Set you mock at success ; you regard anyone who achieves it as a lost soul ; you are utterly convinced that ambition is its own reward, and that public appreciation is the hall-mark of failure. But—and this is why twenty years will inevitably bring Pym's friends out on top—you work, in season and out of season, like the very devil.

And, when occasion arises, you play in exactly the same manner.

This being the case, it will be understood that Pym's Christmas party didn't begin as ordinary parties begin. There is self-consciousness at ordinary parties. There are introductions. The people who sit next to each other have to decide which of them is to impress and which is to be impressed. Sometimes they jockey for position to such a length that the party is over before the point is really settled. Then there are dreadful patches of silence, while the hostess's heart turns cold, and the guests look covertly at their watches, and everybody wonders why human intercourse was ever invented. Oh, yes ; there are only too many parties like that.

But Pym's party was entirely different. The Set needed no

introduction, it didn't care two straws whom it impressed, and as for patches of silence—well, the real difficulty was to make yourself heard at all.

The proprietress of the Pink Pelican had set apart an upper chamber for the preliminary banquet. The little tables were all joined together to make one vast table, and the little tablecloths did their best to create a similar illusion. Everybody ordered what they liked, and everybody got what the proprietress decided to give them—because she knew so well how disappointed they (and she) would be, when the time came to pay for the things they'd ordered. But nobody was heard to complain.

And the Pink Pelican having no licence, there was a constant ebb and flow between the upper chamber and the bar of the Goat and Horseshoe on the other side of the road, while the gentlemen guests endeavoured to cope with the thirsts of both sexes.

Pym herself, looking very bright-eyed in the candle-light, sat at what was clearly intended to be the head of the composite table. You gathered it was the head because her Windsor chair had arms. On her right was Mr. Aubrey Wingate, portrait-painter, twenty-five, unmarried. On her left was Mr. Philip Murray, ditto, ditto, and the same. And to one of these two, so the whole country had been saying for months—their Pym was eventually going to become engaged. But the question was—and here the country had no more idea than the gentlemen themselves—to which?

The country watched, wondered and waited. But it had no favourite in the affair. Neither suitor was assisted, or handicapped, by an income which could possibly support two persons—whatever might happen in the glorious future. It was true that Mr. Wingate could perform surprisingly ingenious conjuring tricks, but then Mr. Murray was no less brilliant on an instrument known as the banjulele. The latter, again, possessed a remarkable talent for mimicry, but the former could sit on a small chair and take a pin out of the bottom of the back leg with his teeth, and, what is more, without touching the ground or overturning. It is easy to see why, with such an accomplished pair of admirers, Miss Yates-Mannerling was a bit slow in making up her mind.

Aurora Wilbraham—yes, that was her genuine name, and, incidentally, the chief qualification for her work on the stage—

who was sitting over by the door, told her neighbour—whom she had never seen before, but whose knowledge of the affair might be presumed from his presence at the feast—that she was backing Philip Murray. Why? “Because Pym’s put him on her left, and she knows that’s her best profile.”

The neighbour looked as if he would have disputed this opinion; but before he could open his mouth, he was interrupted by the guest on his other side—Patsy Greig, who did enamel-work for a Bond Street jeweller, and for no particular reason was always addressed by her surname.

“Nonsense,” she said. “Pym didn’t put anyone anywhere. She never does.”

“And anyway,” added Maurice Kingsley—for there was no secrecy about this dialogue, except that provided by the general uproar, “it’s my firm belief that Pym doesn’t know her right hand from her left.”

“Bless her heart!” added a stentorian guest, with a blue shirt and a beard.

The section of the party nearest the door accepted this final contribution with great enthusiasm, and began thumping on the table with the bowls of their spoons.

“Pym!” they shouted, in voices ranging from Aurora Wilbraham’s deep contralto to Maurice Kingsley’s shrill falsetto. “Pym! Speech! Spec-eech!”

Pym—the perfect hostess—looked up and waved her hand at them.

“No speeches,” she shouted. “Only toasts.”

The stentorian guest leapt to his feet at once, and flourished his tumbler in the air.

“I give you,” he bellowed, “the toast of——”

But here his neighbours caught hold of the edge of his coat and pulled him down again. For however free and easy a party may be, it is obvious that you can’t begin drinking toasts when half those present are still waiting for their second course. The stentorian guest consoled himself by emptying his tumbler at a draught—which, after all, was the main object that he had had in view—and the uproar once more became general.

Aurora Wilbraham began telling the silent man on her right why, in her opinion, Miss Yates-Mannering had missed her vocation. Like other actresses who spend their lives suffering from the most brutal, violent and altogether

overwhelming superfluity of rivals, she was yet filled with a passion for adding to their ranks.

"Personally," she said, "I think Pym draws a great deal better than most people make out. But with colouring and features and a figure like hers, she's simply chucking herself away. I always tell her that."

"Do you?" said the silent man, after a quick glance at the colouring, features and as much of the figure as was available above the table.

"Of course I do," said Aurora. "I tell her she ought to act. Don't you agree?"

The silent man crumbled his bread, and blinked.

"Well—no," he said, at length. "I—I'm afraid I don't."

"But, my dear man," said Aurora, hitting him argumentatively on the forearm, "let's be honest. Is she, or isn't she, wasting her time in drawing pictures for all these potty magazines?"

Her companion hesitated.

"What does it lead to?" demanded Aurora. "Now, on the stage . . ."

And away she went, developing her favourite thesis with less and less reference to its subject, and more and more reference to herself. For that was Aurora's way.

It all made it very much easier for the silent man to preserve his silence.

And so, eventually, they came to the toasts.

"My lords, ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Aubrey Wingate, rising suddenly and banging the table with his pipe. "Pray silence for myself. I give you the health of Pym——"

"—coupled," added Mr. Philip Murray, rising abruptly on the other side, "with that of the whole lot of us."

A stickler for banqueting etiquette, even if he had survived the manner in which this toast was proposed, must have realized that nobody present—except possibly the proprietress of the Pink Pelican—was entitled to drink it. But this didn't worry the Set. It didn't even worry the silent man. They all rose to their feet, tumblers were clinked against wine-glasses, and coffee-cups against pewter mugs. "Pym!" repeated some. "The whole lot of us!" murmured others. Maurice Kingsley took a deep breath and quavered forth an introductory word on a note which was probably a harmonic of the lost chord—so wild and unearthly was it.

"For——" he howled encouragingly.

And then some of them sang "She's a jolly good fellow," thinking of Pym; and others, "He's a jolly good fellow," thinking of nothing at all; while a third section, thinking possibly of the second half of the toast, assured the world in general that they (the singers) were jolly good fellows.

"And," added this last body of vocalists, "so say all of *them*!"

The inversion struck them as so true, so original and so witty that they were left repeating this chorus long after everybody else had drunk the toast and sat down. They were only checked by ultimate exhaustion, after which they laughed hysterically, were thumped on the back by their friends, and so, at length, regained their ordinary composure.

"I now give you," resumed a cadaverous youth, brandishing a rapidly disintegrating cigar in the air, "a very important toast, which I will ask you to drink with three times three."

"Whatever that means," added Patsy Greig.

"Quite," said the cadaverous youth, bowing politely. "Fellow citizens, the toast is Death and Confusion to the Royal Academy, and may the Hanging Committee be hanged."

Loud cheers greeted this sentiment, and the toast was drunk with an enthusiasm which must at least have reached the pitch described as three times three, and was probably a good deal nearer six times six. There followed "Ruin and Beggary to all Art Dealers," "Perdition to the Critics," and "Down with the Amateurs"—each of which was hailed with yells of defiance and volleys of applause. Even the Goat and Horse-shoe, on its wildest Saturday night, could hardly have produced such a stamping, shouting and clapping of hands.

And then the bearded, blue-shirted stentor once more burst from his chair like a Jack-in-the-box.

"Fellow workers, Mr. Chairman and members of the opposition," he roared. "Also your Royal Highness, gentlemen and delegates from overseas. Likewise comrades, buffaloes and friends of my childhood. I give you one more toast." ("Hear, hear." "What, only one?" "Get a move on!") "I give you a toast which will at the same time mark our affection for our hostess—if I may call her that"—("Why not?" "Good old Pym!" "No speeches!")—"and our detestation of her enemies." (Groans and cat-calls.) "Standing

here—or hereabouts—I beg to propose”—here the speaker took a deep breath and rolled his eyes in a savage and ferocious manner—“I beg to propose Destruction to All Art Editors!”

And then an unexpected thing happened. While her guests were still hooting and cheering, and before more than five or six of them had risen from their chairs to honour this last toast, Pym suddenly struck the table with a brass candlestick, so that the grease fell in showers on the cloth, and called out: “No!”

“What!” exclaimed the bearded guest, while the voices of the others died away into silence.

“I said No,” repeated Pym.

“But—but, why not?” asked the bearded guest feebly.

“Because,” said Pym valiantly, “there is an art editor present here to-night.”

There was an immediate and immense sensation. The guests stared at each other, they murmured, they stared at Pym. They stared at the doorway, at the fireplace and the ceiling. A meeting of the Communist Party discovering the Duke of Northumberland under the table could hardly have shown more embarrassment or surprise.

“Where?” asked a dozen voices, in all keys and registers.

Pym pointed across the room.

“Mr. James Anstey,” she said, indicating the silent gentleman who was sitting between Miss Wilbraham and Miss Greig. “He is the art editor of the *Mauve Magazine*, and a friend of mine. I’m sorry—I’m very sorry that——”

Her voice suddenly trembled, and Mr. James Anstey half rose from his seat. But it was Maurice Kingsley who saved the situation. Once more his uncertain head-notes slid round that introductory word.

“For——” he quavered courageously.

And the whole party, much relieved at this swift way out of their difficulty, took up the ancient chorus.

“For he’s a jolly good fellow,” they sang, squeaked, bellowed and droned. “For he’s a jolly good fellow. For he’s a jolly good fe-ell-ow; and—so say all of us!”

Was it the pink candleshade that brought that sudden rush of colour to Pym’s face. We cannot say, any more than we can tell whether it was the flickering light which brought that enigmatic look into the countenance of Mr. James Anstey. All we know is that by the time that the last

note of the chorus had faded away in a rich howl, Miss Yates-Mannering had left her chair and was standing over by the door.

"Come along!" she called out. "Come along, everybody. I'm going over to the palace."

And so, much to the interest of the few idlers who were still out in the cold streets, the whole party came pouring out of the Pink Pelican, and proceeded—some walking, some dancing and some running backwards and forwards like dogs—to Pym's attic. Pym herself was still accompanied by Messrs. Wingate and Murray, one on either side, and we think they must have offered their congratulations to her on the way in which she had dealt with that unfortunate final toast, for as they all mount her steep stairs together, we hear her thanking them.

"Thank you, Aubrey," she says. And: "Thank you, Philip. If I'd had any idea——"

"There, there," interrupt the two suitors, soothingly. And Pym laughs; only it doesn't sound quite—well, not absolutely like her ordinary laugh.

"I'm lucky to have friends like you," she informs them.

"Piffle," says Mr. Murray.

"Bilge," says Mr. Wingate, equally gruffly.

"Business is business," adds Mr. Murray.

And Pym stops abruptly on the landing.

"Oh, no," she says earnestly. "He really *is* rather a friend. He—— Oh, how can I tell you all? But business? Oh, no!"

The suitors haven't the faintest notion what she is talking about, but they gather that she is still a little upset, and the same brilliant idea occurs to both of them. They will lay a sympathetic, consolatory hand on Pym's arm in the darkness; for though Pym has never been the kind of girl to encourage even such distant physical contact, after all it *is* Christmas Eve.

But, alas! at the same moment Pym slips forward through the doorway. The suitors' hands meet in the darkness; meet, and instantly recoil.

"Oh, sorry, old man."

"No. After you."

Click! goes the electric light switch, and there is Pym already turning up her gas-fire, while behind them the rest of the party comes thundering up the stairs. Too late.



Unless—well, there might always be another chance if they stay to the very end.

They decide, not for the first time, that this is what they will do.

Nobody could say that the Set had long memories, or that it was unduly sensitive—except, of course, to outsiders—or that it ever in any circumstances went in for umbrage, dudgeon or pique. If any of the bright spirits who now came crowding round Pym's dessert-dishes and cigarette-boxes still preserved any recollection of that last scene at the Pink Pelican, you may be certain that none of them let it weigh in the slightest degree on their minds. Tact or tactlessness cease to exist when people always say what they think; and if Pym chose to ask an art editor to her party, then—at any rate for that evening—he was no more an art editor than they were artists. In some circles the bearded toast-master's *gaffe*, and the abrupt manner in which he had been checked, would have cast a blight over the rest of the festivities. But in the Set the episode had passed into oblivion at once.

Besides, though silent, the art editor didn't make you feel uncomfortable. It was a misfortune for him, naturally, that he should have a fixed income and be engaged in such a necessarily abominable profession; but in himself, and apart from these disadvantages, he seemed quite a good fellow. The Set hoped, though none of them said it, that he might be induced by his experiences to-night to adopt a permanently lower standard of criticism where Pym's work was concerned. The *Mauve Magazine* was known to pay good prices, and, after all, Pym's pictures were no worse than a lot of others. . . .

Maurice Kingsley, always active in the interests of his friends, decided to help things along there and then.

"You know," he said, flinging himself heavily on the ground by Mr. Anstey's side, "Pym's been turning down commissions right and left these last few weeks. Simply can't cope with the rush."

"Really?" said Mr. Anstey.

"Fact," lied Maurice Kingsley. "These magazines will have to jump in pretty quickly now, I can tell you, or they'll find they're too late. Oh, yes. Mind you, I'm not saying she couldn't take on a really good offer; something big, you know; but otherwise . . ."

He shook his head solemnly, and looked quickly out of the corner of his eyes—perhaps just a little too quickly—to see if Mr. Anstey were impressed. The result of this inspection was doubtful. Mr. Anstey was frowning across at the opposite wall.

"Ah," said Maurice Kingsley, following his glance. "You're looking at those drawings over there. Early work, you know. I can't think why Pym keeps them. But, of course—er . . ."

It wasn't going as well as he had hoped. Mr. Anstey didn't seem to be listening.

"The fact is——" resumed Maurice Kingsley, a little more loudly. "The—ah—I mean to say——"

And here, much to his relief, he was dragged away to take charge of the gramophone, while the others danced. It was a duty for which his interminable good nature, and utter incompetence as a more active performer, particularly fitted him.

His place on the floor was taken by the girl Greig.

"Mr. Anstey," she said, getting right down to it at once. "Is the *Mauve* going to give Pym some work? Is that how you met her?"

"I met her at the office," said the art editor, without answering the first question. "She's—she's——"

"Isn't she!" exclaimed Greig with enthusiasm. "Oh, I *am* glad you're helping her along. You know——"

"Yes, but——"

And here, in turn, the girl Greig was snatched away to dance. Mr. Anstey took a deep breath, saw his hostess approaching, and scrambled to his feet.

"Pym," he said. "I say, Pym——"

"Hullo! Enjoying yourself?"

"Pym, how much longer——"

"Hush! I've promised to tell you before you go. Jim, do you like my friends?"

"Do you expect me to like people who are——"

"What?"

"—in love with you?"

"They're not. Why shouldn't you?"

"Pym!"

"You don't understand."

"I do. I know what you'd be giving up, but——"

"Do you?" said Pym. She looked round the crowded, noisy room. "Am I giving it up?" she asked. "Or is it giving—has it given me up?"

"What was that?"

"Nothing. Go and dance with Aurora."

"I'd much rather——"

"At once!"

Pym stamped her foot, and the art editor left her instantly and obeyed.

But the dancing didn't last long. A loud crack from the interior of the gramophone, accompanied by a cry of anguish from Maurice Kingsley, brought the music to a sudden end.

"Oh, Pym!" he wailed. "I've been and bust the spring. Oh, Pym, I didn't mean to do it. Oh, Lord! Oh, I say!"

But Pym was laughing again.

"Never mind," she said. "Philip will play for us. Won't you, Philip?"

So Mr. Murray brought out his banjulele; but at the last moment he decided to give his imitations instead. They went better than ever; and afterwards Aubrey Wingate did his conjuring tricks, and followed this up by sitting on a small chair and taking a pin out of the bottom of the back leg with his teeth. And then there were dramatic representations, in which the bearded guest particularly distinguished and enjoyed himself in a variety of feminine roles, and Miss Wilbraham showed her professional superiority by being far worse than anyone else, and—incidentally—the small chair was resolved into its component parts.

Then more food, more drinks and more cigarettes. Then, because this time nobody had asked for it, a series of selections on the banjulele. And then, through the haze of smoke, it became apparent that the party was breaking up. The guests slipped away, singly or in twos and threes, but they didn't say good-bye to anybody because they knew they would all see each other the next day. Some of them changed their minds on the stairs, and came back again (which was another good reason for not saying good-bye), but on the whole the wastage continued.

Presently there were only Pym, Aurora, Aubrey Wingate, Philip Murray and the art editor of the *Mauve Magazine*.

"Would anyone," asked Aurora, "like to hear me recite!"

"Would they?" added Pym. She looked at the others. "I'm afraid they wouldn't," she reported. "So it'll have to be something else."

"Well, I know what," said Aurora, quite cheerfully. "Let's turn tables."

"There's only one table to turn," observed Mr. Wingate.

But for want of any better suggestion, and for fear that Aurora might after all oblige with a recitation, they dragged it into the middle of the room, and sat down all round it with their hands stretched out along the edge.

"Oughtn't we to turn out the lights?" asked Mr. Murray presently.

"If you like," said Pym politely.

So they turned out the lights, and sat down again.

"This is a rotten table," said Mr. Wingate about five minutes later. "You would think that on Christmas Eve, and in the dark, and—hullo! Who did that?"

"The table," said Pym. "You've offended it."

"Rot! You pushed it."

"I didn't. I swear I didn't."

"Silence!" boomed Aurora, in her tragedienne's voice. "Concentrate!"

They all frowned, and waited.

"I know what it is," said Pym, so abruptly that everyone else gave a start. "It's no use sitting here doing nothing. We ought to ask it something."

"How?" inquired Mr. Wingate.

"Like this," said Pym. She leant forward, and articulated her question as though engaged in a trunk-call.

"Are you going to speak to us?" she asked.

The table rose very carefully on two legs, and came down again with a solitary thud.

"There!" said Aurora, so much as though the credit were hers that she was instantly accused of having produced the phenomenon herself. But this she absolutely denied.

"May I never get another engagement——" she began violently.

"That settles it," interrupted Pym. "It was the table. Now, what did I ask it?"

"If it was going to speak," said Aurora.

"Then one tap means 'Yes'."

"Or 'No'," suggested Philip Murray.

"Does it mean Yes or No?" asked Aubrey Wingate, in the manner of a public orator speaking to a deaf friend.

"You idiot!" said Pym. "How can it answer that if we don't know which is what. Here, table! Does one tap mean 'Yes'?"

"No, no," contributed Aurora. "What you ought to say is: 'If one tap means "Yes," then please give one tap.'"

"It's too difficult," said Pym. "Say it yourself."

So Aurora said it. And the table gave one tap.

"No doubt about that," said everybody. "Now what shall we ask it?"

Nobody seemed able to think.

"The trouble is," said Aurora, "that we don't know who's in control."

"I'm not," said Pym quickly.

"No, no, darling. I mean, we don't know whose spirit is coming through."

"Mine isn't," said Philip Murray.

"Shut up!" said Pym. "This is serious. Now—well, if it comes to that, does it matter whose spirit it is? Let's just ask if there's a message for anyone."

"All right," said Mr. Wingate. "Hi! Is there a message for anyone?"

One tap.

"Gosh!" said Mr. Murray. "This'll give the subconscious mind something to write home about. Spell it out, old fellow. You know; one for A, and so on."

The table began spelling. Some people said that the first letter was O, and others Q. But they all agreed that the second and third were Y and M.

"So it must have meant me," said Pym. "Come on. What's the message?"

The table seemed to be making an effort of some kind, but there was nothing you could call a tap.

"Concentrate," repeated Aurora warningly.

One tap. Nineteen taps. Eleven taps. Silence.

"Ask," interpreted Aurora.

"But we have asked," protested Mr. Wingate.

"Perhaps it means it'll only answer definite questions," suggested Mr. Murray.

"About Pym," added Aurora.

"Oh, no," said Pym, with a little gasp. "You're not to ask it questions about me. Not definite ones, I mean."

"I shall," said Aurora, from out of the blackness. "I shall ask it whom you're going to marry."

"No," said Pym.

"Yes," said Messrs. Murray and Wingate, speaking as one man.

"Whom," demanded Aurora firmly, "is Pym going to marry?"

Someone—it might have been the subject of the inquiry—gave a little sigh, and there was a rustling sound.

"Quiet, please," said Aurora. "Now, once more. Please tell us the name of Pym's husband."

And then the little table seemed to go mad. It heaved and plunged as Aubrey and Philip battled for mastery. As fast as the one spelt out A, the other dashed through the alphabet to P. The letters came pouring forth in a riot of incoherence, a torrent of gibberish, a rubbish-heap of vowels and consonants.

"Pym! Pym!" shouted Aurora. "Aren't you thrilled?"

"Quiet!" thundered the adversaries. And to it they went again.

They didn't know, poor devils, as we do, that Pym had slipped from her seat nearly five minutes ago, had caught that silent art editor by the sleeve and had drawn him out on to the tiny landing. And then, very gingerly, she had closed the door.

"Well?" she whispered.

"I admit it," said Mr. Anstey. "I cheated."

"What were you going to make it say?"

"I don't know. That Aurora friend of yours made the pace too hot for me. Pym—listen——"

"I know what you're going to say."

"Pym—darling—you promised you'd tell me to-night."

"I keep my promises," said Pym.

"Then——"

"It's not like you to cheat, Jim."

"I was mad. Waiting all evening like that——"

"I know. You didn't cheat over my drawings, did you?"

"I—I couldn't, Pym."

"Other men would have. Other men would have risked taking them, however bad they were, if they thought—if they felt like you. No, no; you were right. I've known

that all along. But I've had such fun here, Jim—with these ridiculous friends. I—I wanted you to like them."

"I do like them," said Mr. Anstey, though it seemed a matter of infinite unimportance.

"Do you? They've been wonderful friends, too. I—I've almost enjoyed this last party."

"Last?" There was an eager note in the art editor's voice.

"Last," echoed Pym. "I've known how they've deceived me, and tried to deceive themselves, about my work. But it's all over now. One can't be a bad artist as well as—oh, Jim, do you think I'll make an awfully bad wife?"

She fell forward into his arms, as the table in the darkened palace went over with a crash.

And that sound, as near as will make no difference, marked the end of Pym's reign in the country of high hopes and empty pockets. She could have stayed on and queened it, even as an art editor's wife, but she wasn't going—she had never meant—to try.

So farewell, Pym. In twenty years your two suitors, who are so doleful and so anxious to conceal it to-night, will have become Academicians with large incomes and large families. Aurora Wilbraham will be fat and forty. Your husband will be a managing director—at least. And you, your incomparable self?

Oh, Pym, you will have grown into a beautiful legend. In the country of short memories and big hearts they will even be telling each other that you knew how to draw. Happy country, we say; and since you have chosen so well, very, very far from unhappy Pym!

H. G. WELLS

*The Jilting of Jane*

H. G. Wells completed his education at the Royal College of Science, and soon afterwards began writing the clever and often humorous stories with a scientific background which made his name. Only less famous than his novels are the *Outline of History* and his ingenious prophecy of the future entitled *The Shape of Things to Come*.





## THE JILTING OF JANE

AS I sit writing in my study, I can hear our Jane bumping her way downstairs with a brush and dustpan. She used in the old days to sing hymn tunes, or the British national song for the time being, to these instruments, but latterly she has been silent and even careful over her work. Time was when I prayed with fervour for such silence, and my wife with sighs for such care, but now they have come we are not so glad as we might have anticipated we should be. Indeed, I would rejoice secretly, though it may be unmanly weakness to admit it, even to hear Jane sing "Daisy," or by the fracture of any plate but one of Euphemia's best green ones, to learn that the period of brooding has come to an end.

Yet how we longed to hear the last of Jane's young man before we heard the last of him! Jane was always very free with her conversation to my wife, and discoursed admirably in the kitchen on a variety of topics—so well, indeed, that I sometimes left my study door open—our house is a small one—to partake of it. But after William came, it was always William, nothing but William; William this and William that; and when we thought William was worked out and exhausted altogether, then William all over again. The engagement lasted altogether three years; yet how she got introduced to William, and so became thus saturated with him, was always a secret. For my part, I believe it was at the street corner where the Rev. Barnabas Baux used to hold an open-air service after evensong on Sundays. Young Cupids were wont to flit like moths round the paraffin flare of that centre of High Church hymn-singing. I fancy she stood singing hymns there, out of memory and her imagination, instead of coming home to get supper, and William came up beside her and said, "Hello!" "Hello yourself!" she said; and, etiquette being satisfied, they proceeded to converse.

As Euphemia has a reprehensible way of letting her servants talk to her, she soon heard of him. "He is *such* a respectable young man, ma'am," said Jane, "you don't know." Ignoring

the slur cast on her acquaintance, my wife inquired further about this William.

"He is second porter at Maynard's, the draper's," said Jane, "and gets eighteen shillings—nearly a pound—a week, m'm; and when the head porter leaves he will be head porter. His relatives are quite superior people, m'm. Not labouring people at all. His father was a greengrosher, m'm, and had a chumor, and he was bankrup' twice. And one of his sisters is in a Home for the Dying. It will be a very good match for me, m'm," said Jane, "me being an orphan girl."

"Then you are engaged to him?" asked my wife.

"Not engaged, ma'am; but he is saving money to buy a ring—hammyfist."

"Well, Jane, when you are properly engaged to him you may ask him round here on Sunday afternoons, and have tea with him in the kitchen." For my Euphemia has a motherly conception of her duty towards her maidservants. And presently the amethystine ring was being worn about the house, even with ostentation, and Jane developed a new way of bringing in the joint, so that this gage was evident. The elder Miss Maitland was aggrieved by it, and told my wife that servants ought not to wear rings. But my wife looked it up in *Enquire Within* and *Mrs. Motherly's Book of Household Management*, and found no prohibition. So Jane remained with this happiness added to her love.

The treasure of Jane's heart appeared to me to be what respectable people call a very deserving young man. "William, ma'am," said Jane one day suddenly, with ill-concealed complacency, as she counted out the beer bottles, "William, ma'am, is a teetotaller. Yes, m'm; and he don't smoke. Smoking, ma'am," said Jane, as one who reads the heart, "do make such a dust about. Beside the waste of money. And the smell. However, I suppose it's necessary to some."

Possibly it dawned on Jane that she was reflecting a little severely upon Euphemia's comparative ill-fortune, and she added kindly, "I'm sure the master is a hangel when his pipe's alight. Compared to other times."

William was at first a rather shabby young man of the ready-made black coat school of costume. He had watery grey eyes, and a complexion appropriate to the brother of one in a Home for the Dying. Euphemia did not fancy him very much, even at the beginning. His eminent respectability

was vouched for by an alpaca umbrella, from which he never allowed himself to be parted.

"He goes to chapel," said Jane. "His papa, ma'am——"

"His *what*, Jane?"

"His papa, ma'am, was Church; but Mr. Maynard is a Plymouth Brother, and William thinks it Policy, ma'am, to go there too. Mr. Maynard comes and talks to him quite friendly, when they ain't busy, about using up all the ends of string, and about his soul. He takes a lot of notice, do Maynard, of William, and the way he saves string and his soul, ma'am."

Presently we heard that the head porter at Maynard's had left, and that William was head porter at twenty-three shillings a week. "He is really kind of over the man who drives the van," said Jane, "and him married with three children." And she promised in the pride of her heart to make interest for us with William to favour us so that we might get our parcels of drapery from Maynard's with exceptional promptitude.

After this promotion a rapidly increasing prosperity came upon Jane's young man. One day, we learned that Mr. Maynard had given William a book. "Smiles' 'Elp Yourself, it's called," said Jane; "but it ain't comic. It tells you how to get on in the world, and some what William read to me was *lovely*, ma'am."

Euphemia told me of this laughing, and then she became suddenly grave. "Do you know, dear," she said, "Jane said one thing I did not like. She had been quiet for a minute, and then she suddenly remarked, 'William is a lot above me, ma'am, ain't he?'"

"I don't see anything in that," I said, though later my eyes were to be opened.

One Sunday afternoon about that time I was sitting at my writing-desk—possibly I was reading a good book—when a something went by the window. I heard a startled exclamation behind me, and saw Euphemia with her hands clasped together and her eyes dilated. "George," she said in an awestricken whisper, "did you see?"

Then we both spoke to one another at the same moment, slowly and solemnly: "*A silk hat! Yellow gloves! A new umbrella!*"

"It may be my fancy, dear," said Euphemia; "but his tie was very like yours. I believe Jane keeps him in ties. She told me a little while ago in a way that implied volumes about

the rest of your costume, 'The master *do* wear pretty ties, ma'am.' And he echoes all your novelties."

The young couple passed our window again on their way to their customary walk. They were arm in arm. Jane looked exquisitely proud, happy, and uncomfortable, with new white cotton gloves, and William, in the silk hat, singularly genteel!

That was the culmination of Jane's happiness when she returned, "Mr. Maynard has been talking to William, ma'am," she said, "and he is to serve customers, just like the young shop gentlemen, during the next sale. And if he gets on, he is to be made an assistant, ma'am, at the first opportunity. He has got to be as gentlemanly as he can, ma'am; and if he ain't, ma'am, he says it won't be for want of trying. Mr. Maynard has took a great fancy to him."

"He *is* getting on, Jane," said my wife.

"Yes, ma'am," said Jane thoughtfully, "he *is* getting on." And she sighed.

That next Sunday, as I drank my tea, I interrogated my wife. "How is this Sunday different from all other Sundays, little woman? What has happened? Have you altered the curtains, or rearranged the furniture, or where is the indefinable difference of it? Are you wearing your hair in a new way without warning me? I clearly perceive a change in my environment, and I cannot for the life of me say what it is."

Then my wife answered in her most tragic voice, "George," she said, "that—that William has not come near the place to-day! And Jane is crying her heart out upstairs."

There followed a period of silence. Jane, as I have said, stopped singing about the house, and began to care for our brittle possessions, which struck my wife as being a very sad sign indeed. The next Sunday, and the next, Jane asked to go out, "to walk with William," and my wife, who never attempts to extort confidences, gave her permission, and asked no questions. On each occasion Jane came back looking flushed and very determined. At last one day she became communicative.

"William is being led away," she remarked abruptly, with a catching of the breath, apropos of tablecloths. "Yes, ma'am. She is a milliner, and she can play on the piano."

"I thought," said my wife, "that you went out with him on Sunday."

"Not out with him, m'm—after him. I walked along by the side of them, and told her he was engaged to me."

"Dear me, Jane, did you? What did they do?"

"Took no more notice of me than if I was dirt. So I told her she should suffer for it."

"It could not have been a very agreeable walk, Jane."

"Not for no parties, ma'am."

"I wish," said Jane, "I could play the piano, ma'am. But anyhow, I don't mean to let *her* get him away from me. She's older than him, and her hair ain't gold to the roots, ma'am."

It was on the August Bank Holiday that the crisis came. We do not clearly know the details of the fray, but only such fragments as poor Jane let fall. She came home dusty, excited, and with her heart hot within her.

The milliner's mother, the milliner, and William had made a party to the Art Museum at South Kensington, I think. Anyhow, Jane had calmly but firmly accosted them somewhere in the streets, and asserted her right to what, in spite of the consensus of literature, she held to be her inalienable property. She did, I think, go so far as to lay hands on him. They dealt with her in a crushingly superior way. They "called a cab." There was a "scene," William being pulled away into the four-wheeler by his future wife and mother-in-law from the reluctant hands of our discarded Jane. There were threats of giving her "in charge."

"My poor Jane!" said my wife, mincing veal as though she was mincing William. "It's a shame of them. I would think no more of him. He is not worthy of you."

"No, m'm," said Jane. "He *is* weak."

"But it's that woman has done it," said Jane. She was never known to bring herself to pronounce "that woman's" name or to admit her girlishness. "I can't think what minds some women must have—to try and get a girl's young man away from her. But there, it only hurts to talk about it," said Jane.

Thereafter our house rested from William. But there was something in the manner of Jane's scrubbing the front doorstep or sweeping out the rooms, a certain viciousness, that persuaded me that the story had not yet ended.

"Please, m'm, may I go and see a wedding to-morrow?" said Jane one day.

My wife knew by instinct whose wedding. "Do you think it is wise, Jane?" she said.

"I would like to see the last of him," said Jane.

"My dear," said my wife, fluttering into my room about twenty minutes after Jane had started, "Jane has been to the boot-hole and taken all the left-off boots and shoes, and gone off to the wedding with them in a bag. Surely she cannot mean——"

"Jane," I said, "is developing character. Let us hope for the best."

Jane came back with a pale, hard face. All the boots seemed to be still in her bag, at which my wife heaved a premature sigh of relief. We heard her go upstairs and replace the boots with considerable emphasis.

"Quite a crowd at the wedding, ma'am," she said presently, in a purely conversational style, sitting in our little kitchen, and scrubbing the potatoes; "and such a lovely day for them." She proceeded to numerous other details, clearly avoiding some cardinal incident.

"It was all extremely respectable and nice, ma'am, but *her* father didn't wear a black coat, and looked quite out of place ma'am. Mr. Piddingquirk——"

"Who?"

"Mr. Piddingquirk—William that *was*, ma'am—had white gloves, and a coat like a clergyman, and a lovely chrysanthemum. He looked so nice, ma'am. And there was red carpet down, just like for gentlefolks. And they say he gave the clerk four shillings, ma'am. It was a real kerridge they had—not a fly. When they came out of church there was rice-throwing, and her two little sisters dropping dead flowers. And someone threw a slipper, and then I threw a boot——"

"Threw a *boot*, Jane!"

"Yes, ma'am. Aimed at *her*. But it hit *him*. Yes, ma'am, hard. Gev him a black eye, I should think. I only threw that one. I hadn't the heart to try again. All the little boys cheered when it hit him."

After an interval—"I am sorry the boot hit *him*."

Another pause. The potatoes were being scrubbed violently. "He always *was* a bit above me, you know, ma'am. And he was led away."

The potatoes were more than finished. Jane rose sharply, with a sigh, and rapped the basin down on the table.

"I don't care," she said. "I don't care a rap. He will find out his mistake yet. It serves me right. I was stuck up about

him. I ought not to have looked so high. And I am glad things are as things are."

My wife was in the kitchen, seeing to the cookery. After the confession of the boot-throwing, she must have watched poor Jane fuming with a certain dismay in those brown eyes of hers. But I imagine they softened again very quickly, and then Jane's must have met them.

"Oh, ma'am," said Jane, with an astonishing change of note, "think of all that *might* have been! Oh, ma'am, I *could* have been so happy! I ought to have known, but I didn't know . . . You're very kind to let me talk to you, ma'am . . . for it's hard on me, ma'am . . . it's har-r-r-d——"

And I gather that Euphemia so far forgot herself as to let Jane sob out some of the fullness of her heart on a sympathetic shoulder. My Euphemia, thank Heaven, has never properly grasped the importance of "keeping up her position." And since that fit of weeping, much of the accent of bitterness has gone out of Jane's scrubbing and brush-work.

Indeed, something passed the other day with the butcher-boy—but that scarcely belongs to this story. However, Jane is young still, and time and change are at work with her. We all have our sorrows, but I do not believe very much in the existence of sorrows that never heal.





## CECIL ROBERTS

### *A Table at Florian's*

Cecil Roberts, journalist, war correspondent and author, is a prolific writer in a variety of fields. He has published a large number of poems, plays, stories and novels, of which the most recent are *Bargain Basement* and *Spears Against Us*.



## A TABLE AT FLORIAN'S

ONLY to a few fortunate mortals do dreams come true. Sir Derek Carleton, sitting at a table at Florian's Café in the great Piazza at Venice, was happy in the fact that he was one of them. Two months ago, at this very hour of five in the afternoon, he was sitting on a stool in the offices of Shawn, Lowell and Co., stockbrokers, Leadenhall Street, and now he was in Venice, and all that he had imagined concerning the place was more than fulfilled.

He was feeling pleasantly drowsy just now, for he had been sightseeing all day. Well, he could indulge his drowsiness. Wonderful thought, he could do just what he pleased! He need not wear a black coat and striped trousers, nor run to catch the eight-fifty from Bromley, where he had lived in rooms with a friend. He had always wanted to travel, to bask in the sun. Yesterday, on the Lido, he had nearly burnt himself, for he had sufficient vanity to be aware that athletic young men of twenty-six are more attractive when tanned.

A sudden clamour of bells broke on his drowsiness. It seemed they were always ringing bells in Venice. There were no streets and no motors, but it was a very noisy place with its steamers hooting on the Grand Canal, its motor launches racing up and down, and the radios blaring through open windows in every little street and square. Then, suddenly, Venice would fall quiet again, and all the ancient loveliness held one in a trance.

Carleton's eyes fell upon some letters on the little iron table before him. He had just fetched his mail from Cook's. His name on the envelopes still looked a little strange. Sir Derek Carleton, Bart., c/o Cook's, Venice. The death of a cousin in Kenya, a vigorous young man, had suddenly lifted him from obscurity and an office stool into independence and leisure. It still seemed a fairy tale that he, Derek Carleton, was a free man, and now leisurely travelling round the world.

How hot it was! They said there was sirocco in the air.

August was not an ideal month for Venice. Everyone had warned him of the heat. But in a couple of days he was joining a cruise that left Venice for Greece and the Bosphorus. This heat was certainly overpowering, and as he looked now at the almost empty Piazza he realized how wisely the Venetians took their siesta.

A few tourists stood by the red flagstaffs in front of St. Mark's, feeding the incredibly greedy pigeons. It was strange to think they were descended from the pigeons that had seen Dante and Petrarch entertained by the Republic. They had fluttered round the tables of this Café when Guardi, that delightful painter of eighteenth-century Venetian life, had hawked his pictures here, when that scallywag, Jacques Casanova, Chevalier de Sengalt, as he had styled himself, had sat here writing to one of his innumerable ladies.

Carleton wondered a little whether those *affaires* of Casanova had not been magnified and multiplied by that incorrigible rake. So far as Carleton had noticed, the women of Venice were reserved and well-chaperoned. They came out at dusk and moved, mothlike, under the colonnades, observing with serious eyes the cosmopolitan scene. But never a smile had Carleton, looking boldly, awakened in those lovely eyes.

A man feeding pigeons at the next table broke Carleton's daydream. Something had been said to him, but in his drowsiness he had not understood. The stranger spoke again, smiling. Carleton shook his head for he knew no Italian.

"Ah, you are English?" asked the stranger, speaking with a very slight accent. "I was saying that if one believed in the transmigration of souls, or in necromancy, some of these pigeons might really be Venetian senators who used to parade here with Titian or Marco Polo. That fellow, for instance," laughed the stranger, throwing some crumbs to the strutting pigeon, "might be the great Titian himself!"

Carleton laughed. The idea was fantastic and pleasing.

"You speak English very well," he said, wishing to be complimentary to the affable Italian. "Were you ever in England?"

"Only for a short time, but I've lived in Paris, and one meets many English there, as many as here."

"There are many here?" asked Carleton, observing his

companion more closely. The fellow was handsome with his long nose and mobile mouth, a little saturnine, perhaps, with dark, penetrating eyes that looked directly at one. He was a man of about forty-five, well-dressed, almost a dandy with his immaculate cuffs and crimson tie, pinned with a pearl too large for English taste. On his fingers there were rings, diamond, ruby, and emerald, too many of them. Bright on those lean, dark hands, they suggested something oriental in the man's origin. But the face was impressive, eager, well-cut, and lined with experience of life.

"There's quite a large English colony here, though I know very few of them now. You see, I've been an exile from Venice for so long," said the Italian.

He said it lightly, but a shadow over the words made the Englishman look at him curiously.

"You're fond of Venice?"

"I count every year I'm not here a year of my life lost," replied the Italian.

"Do you live here now?"

"Happily, yes—I've a little palazzo here, as in the old days when Venice was Venice; I count myself a Venetian."

"It's changed?"

"Changed! *Dio mio!* If you could have seen it once!"

He waved his slender hands, using them with an eloquence only known to the Latin.

"I console myself now with my pictures—Guardi keeps Venice alive for me. What a painter! And to think you could once have bought a picture from him here, at this very table—for, as you know, he used to hawk his pictures here. And often they wouldn't buy them—the fools!"

His eyes lit with indignation.

"I'm afraid I don't know Guardi's work as well as I ought," said Carleton. "I'm not an art expert. I was in the Accademia this morning and I did get a thrill out of that 'Madonna and Child' by Bellini."

"Yes, it's magnificent," agreed his companion, a little impatiently. "I possess a Bellini myself; but you should know Guardi's work. He keeps Venice alive. I've twenty of his pictures, and I'm still collecting them."

The Italian rose from his chair, shaking the spilt crumbs from his trousers. The pigeons scattered at his feet, but one, bolder than the rest, flew up and settled on his arm. He said

something to it in Italian. The bird preened itself confidently, and Carleton, interested by the pigeon's tameness, could almost believe the bird understood every word addressed to it. For a moment it looked at the Venetian with an almost human expression in its brilliant eye, and then pirouetted on its red claws.

"*Basta! Basta!*" cried the Venetian, throwing it off as it began to run up his sleeve. Laughing, he turned to Carleton.

"I called that bird Pepina—Pepina da Monteverde—a lovely young creature I knew, oh, ages ago! Just like a bird she was. P'r'aps it is Pepina. She cooed on your arm just like that!"

He gave a little laugh, but in his eyes there was a shadow of infinite longing. Suddenly he snapped his long fingers for the waiter.

"If I might presume," he said, turning to Carleton with a charming smile, "perhaps you'd care to see my Guardis? They'll show you a vanished Venice. But you mayn't be interested, I quite understand."

Carleton rose to his feet.

"That's most kind of you. I'd be delighted," he replied, eagerly.

The Venetian took from his waistcoat a small silver case, jewelled and richly chased. It looked like an eighteenth-century snuffbox, of Florentine workmanship, but it contained visiting cards. Extracting one, the Venetian proffered it to Carleton with an elegant air.

The waiter arriving, they had a friendly dispute over their bills, which the man, mistaking them for friends, had made into one. The Italian insisted on paying it. "It's such poor hospitality we Venetians can offer you now. Our palaces are closed, our great families are scattered. We have no Doge. We're nothing but ghosts."

He threaded his way out among the tables into the open square.

"My gondola is at the Piazzetta," he said. "I'm about half an hour away."

As they walked down the Piazza the first flush of evening gilded the domes of St. Mark's, and fell warmly on its cupolas and mosaics. The marble façade of the Doge's Palace seemed delicate as lace in that light born of the cerulean sky and the violet lagoon. Carleton was a little surprised to find

it was so late. Already the Venetians were thronging the Piazza for the customary evening promenade. A steamer discharged a crowd of bathers from the Lido. They thronged the small bridge with its vistas of the island of San Maggiore and the Bridge of Sighs. The magic of the place kept its spell on Carleton even after three days. It was like walking in a dream in which there was no measure of time, no hard edge of reality, so tranquil, so muted were all sensations of mind and sight.

The voice of his companion broke his absorption in the scene.

"Here's my gondola. After you, please," he said to Carleton, halting by the steps to the water.

A gondolier in private livery, felt-slippers, with ribboned hat, put out his bent arm, in Venetian fashion, to steady the embarking passenger.

Carleton sank back on to the black leather cushions beside his host. The gondolier deftly steered the boat forward out of the throng of gondolas. The bright steel prow, like a halberd, glided over the evening flood, to the soft accompaniment of lapping water. They were crossing the mouth of the Grand Canal, towards the majestic pile of Santa Madonna della Salute, whose massive dome loomed in silhouette against the crimson sky. Already the evening light had worked its enchantment on water and marble. They had gained the Grand Canal now, and the balconied palaces, with their Gothic windows and dark watergates, glided by.

Suddenly they turned off into a narrow *rio*, where the walls towered above and the dusk lay heavier. They passed under dove-grey bridges arched like a wishbone. Dark Italian face peered at them from the parapets. The silence was now unbroken; they seemed to have turned into a dead canal. They were in a world of faded splendour; the faces of these palaces of dead merchant princes and proud senators had lost their plaster, and stood, sun-withered and rain-rotted, with blistered shutters and crumbling walls. They were pathetic shells of former magnificence.

Carleton's companion had lapsed into a mood of silence, his head sunk on his chest. The fading light brought into prominence the white kid gloves that he had drawn on, contrasting with his black cane. Carleton, absorbed in the pleasure of this smooth journey into a Venice of the past,



made no conversation. His host was the first to break silence.

"*Ecco !* We're here," he cried, a smile lighting his solemn face. "You see I live in a backwater. I've one of the oldest palaces, and the most derelict."

The gondola slid silently towards a gateway with three slimy steps. An iron lantern hung in a Gothic arch above them. They alighted, crossed a small mosaic pavement, and were checked by a massive studded door. Carleton turned while his host produced a key, and was surprised to find the gondola had vanished. It was dark in this loggia, but the water in the wake of the departed boat rippled with light. Carleton heard a lock turn, the door swung back.

"You must pardon me—I'll go first and give you a light," said the Venetian. He fumbled in the black passage, and then produced a lighted candle in a lantern.

"You've no electric light?" asked Carleton, surprised.

His host lifted the old lantern shoulder high. Its feeble light only made the darkness more profound and called to life a world of shifting shadows.

"Electric light in a *cinquecento* palace? No, no. I preserve the atmosphere as much as possible."

There was a note of protest in the answer. This man was eccentric, thought Carleton. There had been an oddness about him from the first. Perhaps he shouldn't have come; the fellow might prove tiresome. Yet it would have been churlish to decline. Moreover, he wanted to see not only the Guardi paintings but also the interior of a genuine palazzo as lived in by a Venetian.

"We've a long flight of stairs for which I apologize," said his companion, halting. "Please follow me closely."

They came to another door, again locked. When it fell back a cry escaped Carleton's lips. Even in that faint candle-light he could perceive the vast scale of this staircase rising before him. It had a massive marble balustrade carved with escutcheons and allegorical animals. They began to ascend. The staircase seemed endless. It was uncarpeted and their feet echoed on the marble steps. It was a mysterious journey into the unknown. The darkness was cavernous and the echo of their feet came reproachfully from the unseen walls and ceiling.

At last they gained a landing, and the Venetian produced

another key. Evidently the place was kept well locked. With a collection of Guardis so valuable there was every reason for this precaution, but it was strange that no servant or porter had been encountered.

At the double doors there was a short delay during which Carleton was enabled to see that they were of richly-grained walnut, with a brass keyhole of antique workmanship. As soon as the key had turned, his Venetian host threw back the door, stood aside, and bade him enter.

Carleton halted on the threshold. Before him was a long salon. He looked down it towards the far end where he discerned a row of six windows in the Lombardesque-Gothic style so much favoured by the palace builders of the sixteenth century. The immensity of this salon was perhaps exaggerated by the faint light falling from a magnificent chandelier of Murano glass, in which burnt a score of candles. The timbered ceiling had painted beams and a fresco, emblazoned with the arms of the Venetian nobles who had occupied the palace. There was little furniture, a refectory table, a Dutch marquetry cabinet, and numerous gilt chairs, ornately carved and upholstered in crimson silk damask, split in places, with the wool stuffing visible. The walls were hung with tapestries, but the light was too faint for these to be examined. Except for some small oriental rugs the long floor was bare, the brown marble so polished that the chandelier and its light were mirrored on its surface.

"What a wonderful room!" exclaimed Carleton, recovering speech.

His host closed the door and paused.

"It should be seen by day. It depresses me now. But you can imagine what it has been. I've seen five hundred people here, talking and dancing, all the loveliest women of Venice—such women, my friend. Goldoni read his plays here, Galuppi played on that clavichord."

His hand pointed to an instrument, delicate, flat-topped, with painted panels and slim gilt legs.

"A clavichord! I've always wanted to see one," said Carleton, crossing the floor, and placing a hand on the flowered lid of the instrument. "May I?" he asked, raising it.

"Certainly—but it's a poor thing. I once took lessons, but I never touch it now," replied his host.

Carleton struck a chord, and the next moment regretted it. The poor wires rattled plaintively, a sign of Time feebly dying in that vast salon. It was like raising a ghost. He lowered the lid while the Venetian watched him, a curious pitying smile on his dark face, but in his eyes Carleton detected infinite melancholy. This was a palace of ghostly memories. How could one man live in it?

As if in answer to that question his host said, "We don't live on this floor. It's too large and uncomfortable. Come, you must meet the Signora and see my Guardis."

He turned, still holding the lantern he had lit at the foot of the stairs, and as they moved its light fell on a cabinet by the wall. Carleton looked inquisitively at the flat-brimmed hat it contained. It was of scarlet cloth, with tufted tassels suspended from each side of the brim.

"That's Cardinal Mirelli's hat. This is the Palazzo Mirelli. He was a member of the family who owned it. And this—well, you see for yourself!" laughed his host.

He raised the lantern, and Carleton looked on a life-sized canvas of a Venetian gallant. It was fresh in colour and seemed newly painted. The subject was a man of forty dressed in the fashion of an eighteenth-century Venetian. In his right hand he held a tricorne hat, with a black domino suspended from a finger. The left hand, jewelled and laced at the wrist, rested lightly on a courtier's sword. The gallant wore a large Venetian cloak, lined with crimson silk, and a hand-embroidered waistcoat of floral pattern. The legs were clad in satin breeches and stockings. The dandy was proclaimed by the delicate shoes, with scarlet heels, as well as by the finesse of each article of dress. The face, somewhat full, was surmounted by a white court wig. Round the throat was bound a cravat fastened with an elaborate jewelled brooch. The star of some Order decorated the breast.

"An ancestor?" asked Carleton, studying the portrait.

"No," laughed his host, raising the lantern so that the face could be more clearly seen.

Carleton started and looked from the canvas to the man at his side.

"Why, it's you!" he exclaimed. Then, feeling some compliment was necessary, "What a marvellous portrait, and what a splendid idea to be painted in that costume! It goes so well with the room."

"Naturally," agreed his host. "Yes, I think it's good. I've just hung it. When I was staying with King Stanislas I met his court painter. The man has genius, I think. So I commissioned him. Of course, he flatters me—but that's how court painters succeed!" he laughed.

They left the salon by a small door in the middle of the wall which gave access to a private staircase. Again they came to a locked door. The Venetian unlocked it, and this time stepped first through the small opening, holding the door back for his guest. Unlike the rest of the palace, this small room was brilliantly lit by a large chandelier.

For a moment the sudden brilliance dazed Carleton, who paused on the threshold of a richly-furnished room. It was panelled with green silk in carved gilt woodwork. On these panels hung a number of small sketches. It was the Guardi room. But as Carleton observed this, he saw something more, and was taken by surprise. He had almost forgotten that this palace was for habitation, so like was it to a closed museum. Yet his host had mentioned this Signora who now rose before him.

The Venetian stepped forward and bowed to the lady with exaggerated deference, and then presented Carleton.

"M'sieur d'Angleterre—my cousin, Mme de Levallois," he said, raising her white hand in his.

So the Signora, if this was she to whom he had alluded, was not his wife. That she was French was unmistakable. The pale oval of her face, the black hair worn tightly back from a perfect brow, the fine lines of the eyebrows, the sweeping lashes and lustrous eyes proclaimed her nationality at a glance. She was dressed with a simplicity that accentuated her exquisite frailty. Perhaps she was twenty-five, though something of the bloom of adolescence lingered in her face. As Derek Carleton took her hand and bowed over it, for this whole atmosphere demanded a courtly grace, he was surprised to feel its coldness.

She had been sitting before a small embroidery frame on which she had begun to create a pattern of flowers with coloured silks. The windows behind her were open. Carleton caught a glimpse of sky, and of a young moon half-hidden by one of Venice's cowed chimneys. Briefly he wondered why, in this warm August night, Mme de Levallois' hand should be so chilly.

She invited him to take a seat, and in a low voice inquired how long he had been in Venice. His host remained standing behind his cousin's chair, his eyes watching her closely as she spoke. The conversation was now in French.

"You speak my language beautifully, M'sieur. You are often in France?" she asked.

"I was at school in Tours for three years," replied Carleton.

There was a pause, and Carleton became aware that the conversation was constrained. Perhaps it was his host, standing there stiff and uncommunicative behind his lovely young cousin. The Venetian gazed at her white shoulders and arms, then, with singular abruptness, took a silk shawl from off the back of the chair and draped her shoulders. It might have been an act of courtesy, but something in his manner carried a sense of reproof. It was as if he suddenly resented other eyes seeing his cousin's perfection of form.

"I brought this gentleman here to see my Guardis," he said, leaving his place behind the chair. "They're here," he added, addressing Carleton, and leading him to the opposite end of the room.

The collection was hung on three walls. It did not require the eye of a connoisseur to see that this score or so of Guardi's paintings represented some of that master's finest work. They were enjoyable for themselves, fascinating sketches of the life of *settecento* Venice, of the foibles and fashions of that extravagant era. Here were majestic senators of the Serene Republic, and laughing, dominoed ladies accompanied by their cavaliers. Here a group clustered round the gaming table, embarked for some lagoon excursion, gossiped in a *ridotto*, or paraded the bright Piazza.

They were interesting as sketches of Venice's age of extravagance and corrupt decline, but they were enhanced by the vivid commentary of their owner. He knew the history of eighteenth-century society in every detail. He recalled and made alive an era of spendthrift immorality, laughing intrigue and gorgeous pageantry of costume. Venice, sinking into shameful eclipse, danced here through her riotous nights, carrying her ribaldry into the cloister and convent. An aristocracy plunging headlong down its degenerate course competed with the adventurers of Europe who had flocked hither to gamble and follow the rout of frivolous society.

Carleton listened, catching something of his host's enthusi-

asm for Guardi's superb chronicle of Venice's social splendour. There was in his description of the paintings no apparent consciousness of the futility of these men and women who had feasted and danced while the palsy of death crept through the body of the ancient republic. Here was the flower of society in Europe's most wanton centre. And now they escaped oblivion only by the painter's brush.

The survey ended. The ecstatic connoisseur seemed exhausted by his spirited exposition. They returned now to Mme de Levallois, who throughout had been engrossed in her embroidery.

"Perhaps M'sieur would like some refreshment?" she said, addressing her cousin, who was now staring moodily into the night.

The suggestion awakened him out of his melancholy reverie.

"Ah, forgive me, M'sieur! Of course! Of course! Excuse me a moment," he cried, and hurried from the room by another door leading to an apartment beyond.

"M'sieur!"

The voice rang sharply in Carleton's ear, so changed in tone, so urgent, that he swung round from contemplation of a statue and found himself looking into the face of a tense, frightened woman. She had risen to her feet and advanced towards him, her face bloodless, her dark eyes large with appeal.

"M'sieur, help me, help me! I must get away from here! Don't you see he is mad?" she cried. "He is evil, too! If I could tell you! But there's no time. Take me now, please, now—now!"

She stretched out her hands and clutched the lapels of his coat. He could feel her tremble as she stood before him, her eyes wide with desperation.

"But, Madame," began Carleton, "I only——"

"Listen!" she cried, interrupting him. "This isn't hysteria. Don't you see I'm a prisoner—locked in here? Every door is locked. He's mad and evil—you can't know, you can't imagine what I've suffered!"

"He ill-treats you?" asked Carleton, scanning her face.

"Physically, no. But worse, far worse. He brings his women back here, into that room, to humiliate me, to break my spirit."

"Women!" echoed Carleton.

"Yes, endless women, and I have to listen to these orgies, here, a prisoner. He hates me now. He brought me from Paris three months ago. M'sieur, I'm not a bad woman! Do I look vicious? He promised me everything, protection, kindness, love. I left Paris believing him——"

"Your home's in Paris?" asked Carleton.

"I've no home. I'm an actress. He saw me in Paris, in a play. He was charming. He told me of life here. I've always longed to see Venice, so——"

She stopped and listened. The sound of returning footsteps in the next room checked her. She turned her face in frantic appeal to Carleton.

"We must go now! The doors weren't locked behind you?"

"No."

"Then we can go," cried Mme de Levallois. "Please, please believe me! He'll be back in a moment."

She caught up a Venetian silk shawl and threw it over her gleaming white shoulders. Then she moved towards the door.

For a moment Carleton hesitated. It seemed extraordinary treatment of his host, who had been so charming. But a succession of strange incidents left him in no doubt of the man's eccentricity. The extraordinary manner in which the gondola had glided away, the dark candle-lit palace, the life-sized portrait in fancy dress, all these things were bizarre, even here in Venice.

He looked at the woman by the door. Woman? She seemed more a girl in her lovely frailty, and whatever doubt lingered in his mind was dispelled by the appeal in her eyes as she waited for him.

As he went to her she rested a hand momentarily on his arm, and looked into his face.

"Thank you, M'sieur," she said, simply.

The next moment they were through the door. The landing was cavernously dark.

"A moment!" he cried, and dashed back into the room. Mounting a chair, he could just reach the chandelier, and took from it a lighted candle. Then, glancing at the door through which the Venetian had disappeared, he saw he could bar it temporarily by jamming the back of the chair under the handle. It might give them a few minutes' grace in the

pursuit. Hastening to the landing, they made their way swiftly down the broad stairs. Their feet sounded monstrously loud on the stones.

"Is there anyone else in the house?" asked Carleton, wondering whether the way below them might be barred.

"No—only the gondolier who lives on the ground floor, in the courtyard."

"Then we must pass him?" asked Carleton.

Recalling the stalwart young man who had brought him to the palazzo, he wondered whether it would be better to bribe or fight him in the event of obstruction.

"He mayn't be there. There's a gate in the yard leading to the street behind, but it's kept locked by Guido," said Mme de Levallois, breathless as they hurried down.

"Guido?" asked Carleton.

"That's the gondolier."

They were on the grand salon landing now. A final flight of stairs brought them to the first door the Venetian had unlocked. The mosaic pavement and the watergate lay beyond. So far there was no sound of pursuit, but it could not be long delayed. What could they do when they gained the canal? They had fled into a cul-de-sac, and there was only one way out. They must swim.

At the bottom of the stairs, Carleton found the heavy, studded door by which they had entered the palazzo after they had crossed the mosaic pavement. He opened it, creaking on its hinges. With the feeble light of the candle Carleton looked to see whether the key had been left in the lock. To his dismay there was no key. He could not stop the pursuit. They were trapped!

Across the pavement they could see the oily gleam of the water in the dark canal. To make their plight even more desperate, there was no walled walk on the opposite side of the canal, nothing but the blank wall of another palace with high, iron-grilled windows.

On Carleton's left the dim candlelight fell on a ringed handle. There was a door he had not seen at first.

"That's to the courtyard," cried his companion. Carleton seized the handle and turned it. But the door did not move. It was barred on the other side.

"And now?" he said, forcing a cheerfulness into his voice which he did not feel.



Her face was deathly in the candlelight, and he hesitated to make his proposal to this delicately clad girl.

"Can you swim?" he asked.

Whatever answer she was about to make was checked by an unmistakable sound above. Someone was hurrying down the stone stairs. The Venetian was pursuing them. For a moment it flashed through Carleton's mind that a madman might not stop short of murder in his rage. The fellow was capable of anything. There were unpleasant stories of these side canals in the old days. And here he was, without a defensive weapon of any kind.

They could hesitate no longer. The footsteps drew nearer. Their pursuer had reached the bottom door. In his wild haste he had descended without a light. He now paused, and there was a breathless silence, pursuer and pursued waiting tensely.

"Come!" said Carleton, sharply, and seizing his companion by the arm he hurried to the water's edge. Blowing out the candle, they stood for a moment in the darkness, the water faintly glimmering at their feet. Then the Venetian's footsteps sounded again as he crossed the pavement in their direction.

Carleton could not see the girl whose arm he held; only the faint outline of her white dress was visible.

"Now!" he whispered.

"Yes!" she answered.

But in the moment in which he had made the command to jump, something dark glided by the watergate. It came without a sound, a boat with a faint yellow light at its prow.

"Jump!" commanded Carleton, and not risking her refusal, he put his arm round the girl's waist and carried her in his leap for the boat.

They alighted, lost balance, and fell in the bottom of the boat, which rocked violently under the sudden weight. There was a loud cry from the man at the stern, who was almost thrown into the water. He began to abuse them in voluble Italian. Then from the watergate another voice filled the quiet canal with frenzied commands to the boatman.

Hastily, Carleton scrambled to his feet. The man in the stern had stopped rowing and cursing, bewildered by this sudden physical and verbal attack.

"On! On!" shouted Carleton, frantically. And then, realizing the fellow could not understand him, he violently

gesticulated, making it plain that the man was to row on as fast as possible. All this time the voice behind commanded the rower to stop.

Carleton pulled a fifty-lire note from his pocket and waved it in the fellow's face. The effect was magical.

"*Sì, sì, Signore!*" he cried, and began rowing energetically.

A few yards ahead the boat turned into another canal, and utter silence, save for the dipping of the oar, wrapped them round again.

Carleton turned to assist Mme de Levallois. She had risen to her feet and was smoothing out her dress. He saw now that the boat was filled with vegetables, with baskets of onions, tomatoes, peaches, and large green and yellow watermelons.

They had leaped, luckily, on to a russet sail, furled up in the bottom of the boat. Carleton remembered seeing these fruit boats sailing down the lagoon at evening, from the gardens on the long island of Pelestrina, and bound for the fruit market on the Rialto.

"You are not hurt?" asked Carleton, solicitously. "God bless this fruiterer!"

"No, not a scratch. But I'm cold. I felt that water before I jumped!"

She laughed, and he was startled, not only by the beauty of her teeth and eyes, but also by the sudden realization that this was the first time he had seen her smile.

"We'll get this fellow to land us, and find a gondola," he said.

A few minutes later they hailed a gondola. The owner of the vegetable boat, having received his fifty lire, bowed them off, smiling, and wondering why good fortune had leapt upon him in this strange manner.

"Damn!" exclaimed Carleton, suddenly.

"What is it?" asked Mme de Levallois, at his side.

"I've made your M'sieur What's-his-name a present of my hat and stick."

"M'sieur Casanova—but how sad," said Mme de Levallois.

"Casanova?" repeated Carleton, some memory awakened.

"Is that his name?"

"M'sieur Jacques Casanova, he calls himself."

"Not—not *the* Casanova, the famous rake?" cried Carleton.

"Don't you understand, M'sieur?" asked Mme de Levallois.

"He thinks he is the great Casanova. Didn't you see his

portrait, didn't you realize nothing exists for him after the eighteenth century? All his people come out of Guardi, all——"

"Good lord! What a fool I am! Of course! Why, the man's quite mad!" exclaimed Carleton.

He felt for his cigarette case, and near it he found something else. It was a thin card, the very card the fellow had given him at Florian's. In the competition for the bill he had neglected reading it, and had thrust it in his pocket. He examined it now.

JACQUES CASANOVA  
CHEVALIER DE SENGALT

In silence Carleton passed the card to his companion.

"I begin to understand now his—his pastime," said Carleton, grimly.

Mme de Levallois did not answer for a few moments. Then turning her face to his, she spoke, and he noticed her mouth trembled.

"I've been very foolish. I'm neither his cousin, nor Madame de Levallois. I'm Mademoiselle de Levallois. I'm grateful to you, M'sieur. I don't wish you to be under any misconception. He enticed me away from Paris. He was very charming, very romantic, and oh, I so much wanted to see Venice, to live! M'sieur, before I leave you, my heart thanks you."

Her quaint speech touched a chord of chivalry Carleton had not known existed in him. For a moment he had glimpsed a vista of romance. He had rescued this lovely creature from a mad philanderer. She had nowhere to go, this was Venice, and it seemed as if adventure were just beginning. But her words, her naïve confession, brought him to earth. He was in Venice, but it was unmistakably clear that he could not be Casanova the Third.

He called to the goldolier behind him.

"Hotel Darieli!" he commanded.

Mlle de Lavellois looked at him.

"M'sieur, I will now, please——"

He checked her words and took one of the hands spread in graceful gesture before him. How cold and delicate it was!

"Mademoiselle, we must be sensible. You must sleep

somewhere to-night. You must have clothes. You must have a ticket for Paris. You must allow me to see this through."

"But, M'sieur, you are too kind—too——"

She faltered. He saw tears well up in her eyes.

"Why should you, M'sieur?" she cried, choking. He smiled and pressed her hand reassuringly.

"Because, Mademoiselle, you're still in the hands of a madman."

She looked at him, bewildered with his words.

"I do not understand, M'sieur?" she said.

"You have left the mad Casanova, and have found the mad Englishman, that's all! Look, Mademoiselle—there's the Doge's Palace. You'd think it was made of lace instead of stone!"

She looked, but he was not thinking of palaces or lace. He was thinking how lovely were her long lashes shading those dark eyes.



GILBERT FRANKAU

*Patricia Jackson's Pearl Necklace*

Gilbert Frankau was educated at Eton and served in the Royal Artillery on the French and Italian fronts during the War. He has been writing since 1910, and has published several volumes of verse and many novels, including *Peter Jackson*, *Cigar Merchant*; *The Love Story of Aliette Brunton* and *Christopher Strong*, which has been filmed.



## PATRICIA JACKSON'S PEARL NECKLACE

### I

THIS is a story of our Mr. Peter Jackson, sometime "senior" partner in P. Jackson & Co., Cigar Importers, of Lime Street, London, E.C. (you remember him, perhaps: a dour, stocky, dark-haired youngster, with a tooth-brush moustache and curious eyes which used to change colour, from grey to darkest black, when he lost his temper); and the incident it relates happened ever such a while ago, years before he bought the Nirvana cigarette factory, years before he dreamed of being a soldier in the Great War, years before he came home wounded from France to console himself for the loss of both businesses by falling in love with his own wife.

They were just good pals at the time, Peter and his young "Mrs.", the tall, blonde, dignified, rather unsentimental Patricia. Just good pals—though their first daughter, Evelyn, had been born six months.

Evelyn's arrival—one may as well be frank about the matter—had not improved the palship. Knowing that Peter had wanted a son, Patricia realized—and rather resented—his obvious disappointment. If Evelyn had been a son, Peter would have "done something for the lad," something Peterish—invested a thousand at compound interest till the boy was twenty-one, laid down a cellar of port, or (most probably) taken out a fresh life insurance. Evelyn being a girl—he did nothing.

And Patricia thought that something ought to be done. Nothing lavish, of course—they couldn't afford to take a lot of capital out of Jacksons, where it earned fifteen per cent, and put it into Consols at three. Still, some tangible commemoration did seem indicated.

### II

Patricia broached the idea of that commemoration very tentatively, one night early in a January of the far-away



nineteen-hundreds. Smith, the efficient parlourmaid, had cleared away dessert from the big mahogany dining-table of their house in Lowndes Square. Peter was clipping a cigar preparatory to coffee and liqueurs.

Patricia said : " Don't you think we ought to do something for the kiddie ? "

" Do something ? " He looked at her through the first haze of his smoke. " It's got a nurse, hasn't it ? And a perambulator ? And a nursery ? What more do you imagine we ought to do for it, old thing ? "

She never could get used to that " it " ; and her blue eyes held no smile as she answered, " Francis " (Peter's idle-rich cousin Francis Gordon was Evelyn's casual godfather) " gave *her* silver brushes for a christening present."

" Francis always was an extravagant ass," remarked our Mr. Jackson. " What's the use of hair-brushes to a thing that hasn't got any hair ? "

Nevertheless, even Peter's obtuseness realized that the golden-tressed girl in the black charmeuse frock was annoyed about something. She refused a liqueur ; and sat silent—" fractious " he phrased it to himself—over her coffee. " No good having a row," thought our Mr. Jackson.

" Look here, old thing," he began. She looked—annoyed. " You know I don't approve of making a fuss about the kid. That's waste of money. But I'll tell you what I *will* do." He paused, scrutinizing the ash of his cigar. " I'll buy *you* a bit of jewellery. Ring, if you like—diamonds. Or a brooch—a sapphire brooch. Jolly stones, sapphires."

" I don't want anything for myself," retorted Pat : but her heart softened, as it always did soften when he displayed interest in her personal adornment. He was so very—immature, this twenty-five-year-old husband of hers. One couldn't be angry with him for long.

" But that's all rot," he said. " I'd like to give *you* something. All I object to is wasting money on the kiddie. It'll want plenty of money when it grows up. Why, dash it, Pat ! do you realize that we may be talking about its marriage portion in a few years from now ? "

And at that, it seemed to the mother-heart of Patricia as though she saw a vision : Evelyn grown up ; Evelyn in white satin, a lace veil over her brown hair (she *had* got hair, whatever Peter might say ! ) ; Evelyn being married to an entirely eligible

young man at St. Jude's, Kensington. Moreover, round Evelyn's young throat hung a necklace, a necklace of pearls, her mother's gift.

"All right," said she. "You *shall* give me some jewellery. Only it mustn't be a ring, or a brooch. It's got to be something really worth while." She hesitated. "I want a necklace, Peter. A pearl necklace."

"The devil!" thought our Mr. Jackson. "*That* can't be done decently a penny under seven hundred and fifty." (Even pearls, you will notice, were cheaper in those blessed far-off days!)

"Pearls are a good investment, aren't they?" went on the woman who knew her husband.

"Oh, quite. . . I say, you're not pulling my leg, are you, Pat? . . . We're not millionaires, you know."

"Pulling your leg," she smiled back at him. "Rather not. It's a pearl necklace or nothing. But I shan't be a bit vexed if you don't give it to me. . . ."

Whereupon, Patricia changed the subject; and neither that night nor for many a long day thereafter was it again alluded to between those reticent animals, our Mr. Jackson and his "Mrs."

### III

Breakfasting in his wife's company on the morning after their discussion, our hero preserved his usual silence. He anticipated an interview of more than ordinary importance in the City that afternoon; and, like most good business men, was busy turning over the details of it in his mind while that mind still felt fresh. . . . But, somehow, the idea of the pearl necklace disturbed thought. Had he actually *promised*? If not, could he—with any decency—refuse? If so, how the devil was he going to get hold of the money?

Kissing his wife good-bye, he thought, "Good old Pat. She's a ripper. No sentimental nonsense about my Mrs. . . . But seven hundred and fifty quid is seven hundred and fifty quid."

On his way to the office, he dropped into the Army and Navy Stores; and succeeded in selling them six cabinets of *Corona Coronas*—at a price which left about enough profit to pay his taxi. "Curse these Trust goods," ruminated our Mr. Jackson; "one could sell them all day and all night without

making expenses. Might just as well take one's money out of one pocket and put it into the other."

It may here be mentioned that "The Trust" was the billion dollar corporation domiciled at 111 Fifth Avenue, New York, which had just butted into the Havana cigar business—much to the chagrin of Peter and various other merchants whose interests, both financial and sentimental, lay with the "Independents"; and that the interview which had busied our Mr. Jackson's mind over breakfast was with the new—and by no means "easy"—representative of that octopus-like entity.

"You can say what you please," said our Mr. Jackson's elderly partner, Tom Simpson, when, arrived at the office, he started in to discuss the forthcoming appointment, "you can say what you please—but I don't like these Yankee monopolies. In your father's time, we wouldn't have anything to do with them at all. Cheek, I call it—coming to us now. They only do it because they're losing business."

"Possibly," remarked Peter.

Tom Simpson wagged his brown beard doubtfully, took his top-hat from behind the door, and went out to lunch at "The George and Vulture". On his return, he perceived the "back office" to be fuller even than usual of blue cigar-smoke; and entering, found his partner already deep in converse with Thomas B. Edgar, "Vice-President of the Havana Cigar & Tobacco Factories, Inc."

Edgar, a clean-shaven, heavy-jowled, blue-eyed Virginian of nearly fifty, was holding forth at some length. He rose to shake hands with Simpson (whom he knew, though senior in age, to be Peter's junior in capital holding of Jacksons) and continued his harangue.

"So you may just as well admit," concluded Edgar, "that—as you've got to handle a certain percentage of our goods—it would be wise for you to make at least as much money on them as the other fellow."

"Precisely," said Peter. "Point is—how much *does* the other fellow make?"

"That," retorted Edgar, "depends on how many cases he buys."

At which point Simpson, chipping in with a heavy, "I never did approve of differential terms between shippers; it seems to me against commercial morality," was met with Peter's

aphorism, "My dear Tom, commercial morality's the other fellow's point of view"; and subsided into silence.

"Look here, Edgar," went on our Mr. Jackson, fixing his weed at the corner of his mouth in a manner slightly reminiscent of Captain Kettle, "do I understand that we're not on rock-bottom terms for your goods, because if so——"

"My dear sir," countered the American blandly, "can you tell me any reason why you *should* be on rock-bottom terms? You don't *push* our cigars, you only sell them when you're obliged to. All your effort goes on the Independents."

"Naturally," admitted Peter. "We don't make any money on your stuff."

They eyed each other for a moment or so; then Edgar said: "But supposing I put up a proposition by which you could make money, big money, on your brands?"

"Meaning an inside rebate?"

"Well"—the American's cigar had gone out; he threw it in the grate; took a fresh one from his pocket, and lit up with irritating slowness—"well—not exactly a rebate."

There intervened a considerable silence; during which—for the first time in his business career—our Mr. Jackson allowed home thoughts to obsess him during office hours. Here, perhaps, might be a chance of making that seven hundred and fifty quid!

"You see," went on the shrewd voice of 111 Fifth Avenue, "rebates, in our country, have rather a nasty name. Our Interstate Commerce Legislation——" Edgar waved a deprecatory hand. "So I wouldn't like to call it exactly a rebate. No, sir. Mr. J. B. Duke does not approve of rebates. But he does approve of payment by results. That, after all, is only common fairness to our importers."

"You can call it anything you like," decided our Mr. Jackson. "Provided we can make a thousand or two out of it."

"There's no limit to this proposition," said Thomas B. Edgar. "How much did you spend with us last year?"

"Fifty-seven thousand five hundred dollars and twenty-four cents," replied our Mr. Jackson, who rather prided himself on accuracy in money matters.

"You could have done double that if you'd wanted to."

"Possibly. Possibly not."

The seller hesitated; then he made his proposition: "Well,

if you're prepared to double your business this year, I'll give you back ten dollars on every hundred you spend with us. On the whole year's business."

"Goods ordered, or goods shipped?"

"Shipped, of course. We don't want you putting in orders to make up your quantity on the thirty-first of December."

"But supposing we give the orders in time and you don't ship 'em."

"We'll ship 'em all right."

"Is this to be a verbal arrangement?" put in Simpson.

"No, sir. I'm prepared to give any undertaking your lawyers and our legal department can fix up between them."

... For the purposes of our story it suffices that, after various other discussions, Mr. Thomas B. Edgar's offer—an offer which, briefly recapitulated, meant that if our Mr. Jackson could sell one hundred and fifteen thousand dollars' worth of Edgar's goods he would pouch the satisfactory rebate of ten per cent on the lot—was accepted.

#### IV

Now the whole jest of the English Havana cigar business is, or was, this: That you cannot, even by taking thought, increase the number of smokes for which the consumer is prepared to pay. Resultantly, if Jackson & Co.—in order to pouch that satisfactory rebate—wanted to expand their trade in Trust goods, only two ways of doing so lay open to them. They must either displace their own sales of Independent cigars, or—take Trust trade away from their competitors.

Our Mr. Jackson being, at that period of his career, a purely predatory animal, chose the latter method; and a very pretty struggle subsequently ensued between his firm and what Maurice Beresford of Beresford & Beresford called "the other thieves in the cigar trade." So that, for some months to come, the telephone operator at Lime Street overheard various conversations on the following formula:

"Hello, is that Mr. Jackson?"

"It is."

"We're so and so's. Have you got any *Corona Coronas*?" (Or "*Murias* sixpenny" or "*Bock Perfectos*.")

"Yes. We can do you two thousand in hundreds." (Or a "case," or "half a case," or "five thousand.")

"What's your price?"

"Eight five and six in bond."

"I can do better than that."

"Make it eighty-five—to you."

"Eighty-four, Mr. Jackson. I can buy them at that from Schornsteins."

"All right. But you must take the lot."

Also by the time that July, and with it the necessity for making out their "Christmas orders" came round, one new feature in the game was abundantly evident: to wit, that Thomas B. Edgar's liberality had not been exclusively confined to Jackson & Co.

"We're being done in the eye," said Simpson gloomily. "What's the use of a concession if he gives it to everybody?"

"He's acting up to your standard of commercial morality," grinned Peter. "I rather like old Edgar. There's no sentiment about him, anyhow. By the way, we've still got a longish way to go if we want to double our business with him."

"We have," grunted Simpson. "And my advice is to chuck up the whole thing. They've only shipped us fifty thousand dollars' worth so far. And we haven't made pocket money on them."

For a moment Pat's pearl necklace trembled in the balance. Then our Mr. Jackson said:

"Damn it, Tom, I'm not going to be beaten. Let's give Edgar an order to make up our hundred and fifteen thousand dollars right off the bat. They're bound to be shipped by Christmas."

"We'll never sell 'em," prognosticated Simpson.

"Rats! I'll sell 'em somehow or other, if I have to cut the price of *Corona Coronas* to eighty bob."

"We shan't get very fat at that rate."

"It's all extra business," said Peter—and in the end, as usual, got his own way.

Meanwhile the vice-president of "The Havana Cigar & Tobacco Factories Inc.," being informed by Isaac Schornstein that "dat tam fellow Peter Jackson vill ruin your business—he's gutting de profit to ribbons," consulted his legal department; retailers of the succulent weed rejoiced; and Patricia alternately decided that Peter was mean not to have given her the necklace, and that she had been avaricious in asking for it.

## V

It must not be imagined that the peculiar connubial relationship of the Jacksons excluded—on the husband's part at any rate—a very strong possessive instinct. To Peter, his wife's gold hair, blue eyes, smooth cheeks and smoother shoulders represented very nearly the most attractive thing in the world—the most attractive, of course, being a business deal in which he got the better of the Schornsteins, the Beresfords, the Elkinse or some other denizens of that centre of Havana cigardom, St. Mary Axe.

Whether Patricia then realized this possessive instinct or not is a point open to doubt. Up to the age of thirty, she was a "cold" woman, who thought "that sort of thing" rather—troublesome. Still, his admiration pleased her; and during the summer holidays of what they afterwards came to call "the necklace year," she had no reason to complain of inattention.

They spent those holidays at the Grand Hotel, Folkestone—an ordinary middle-class couple, white-attired by day, evening-dressed at night: nurse, baby and perambulator attached for sign of utter respectability.

But our Mr. Jackson, for all his outward ordinariness, was worried. Every evening, as they walked their dignified way down the dining-room, he used to survey the wives and daughters of the other business-men. Every evening, as he ordered their wine, he used to think to himself: "Damn scraggy females—Pat's neck and shoulders make them look like skeletons. What's the use of hanging jewellery on skeletons? Now, if Pat had that woman's pearls—" And the over-fat, who usually possessed the most costly adornments, annoyed him even more than the over-thin!

A letter from Simpson did not improve the situation.

"The Trust," wrote Simpson, "are shipping any amount of goods to Schornstein. We got practically nothing in from them this week. . . . I wonder if you could run up for the day on Tuesday. There are one or two things I'd like to talk to you about."

Peter "ran up" to town for a day—and stayed two nights. The trade, always a hot-bed of intrigue, was positively seething. Simpson had heard rumours of a counter-Trust—an amalgamation of the Independent factories and their

shippers. The Independent factories intended to take a strong line ; would refuse shipments to anyone who handled Trust goods.

"Rats !" snapped Peter, when he heard the plan. "They can't bluff *me* with that sort of tale."

"You may be right," opined Simpson. "But, either way, it can't make much difference to us. We can't sell Trust goods if they won't ship 'em."

Before going back to Folkestone, our Mr. Jackson interviewed Edgar, who promised larger supplies ; but did not divulge the contents of a certain paper in his desk which read : "Jackson contract does not apparently contain any obligation on our part to fill orders."

That evening over dinner, Pat's neck looked ominously bare !

## VI

By the fifteenth of October—what with the incipient annoyances of "Christmas trade," a batch of letters from the Independent factories (all full of vague promises and still vaguer threats), Simpson's gloom about the unfilled Trust orders, and a casual remark of Isaac Schornstein's : "My poy, two can play at de game of gutting prices"—our Mr. Jackson was in a thoroughly bad temper.

"Putrid business !" he fulminated to his partner. "Wish to goodness I were out of it. What the devil *are* we going to do about these Trust goods ?"

"What I'd like to know," said Simpson blandly, "is : what are we going to do about the Independents ? Maurice Beresford's off to Havana next month—you can bet he'll stir up all the trouble he can. We shall look pretty if both sides turn us down."

Said Peter : "Curse Maurice Beresford. I wish *I* could go to Havana."

"Why don't you ?" retorted Simpson. "It'd be the very thing. Your father always went once a year."

"And who'd look after the Christmas trade, I'd like to know ?"

Simpson laughed : "I think *I* might be able to manage that." *Sotto voce*, he added : "You seem to forget, my lad, that I was in this business before you were born."

But it was not until the middle of November that Peter



made up his mind to the journey ; and even then his conscious mind refused to admit its reason. "You're going to Havana," said his conscious mind, "because it's part of your job to know the manufacturers personally. You're going via New York, because that's the quickest way. You'll be back early in January, because it would be a waste of time and money to stay any longer."

Whether the subconscious mind of our Mr. Jackson—if that curious compound of predatory and possessive male could have made itself audible—would have said : "You're going after those pearls, because you hate seeing Pat's neck unadorned," remains a question for some psychological novelist with four hundred pages (and three hundred readers) to satisfy. All the writer of this tale knows is that they said "Good-bye" to each other in the hall of their Lowndes Square house about as passionately as two icicles—"Telephone Simpson if you get hard up," being the exact phrase which separated them.

## VII

Barring a trip or so to the Continent, the voyage to the States on the *Mauretania* was Peter's first out-of-England experience ; and he thoroughly enjoyed it. The atmosphere of luxurious ship-board—particularly of the over-decorated smoking-room—appealed to him. Essentially a travelling-man—with a good stomach for the sea, an even better head for wine and spirits, and a knowledge of poker which he flattered himself to be fairly complete—our Mr. Jackson made various acquaintances, both more and less desirable ; was respected by his cabin-steward, ignored by the women-folk, and generally as *avéragé* a passenger as any six-day company can desire. Only on the last evening aboard did he revert to his cigar-broking self.

The wind, against which they had been buffeting their three-hundred-and-sixty-knot day, died down by midnight to the faintest of off-shore breezes, as Peter, cigar in mouth, fur coat over smoking-jacket, tramped the abandoned spar-deck. His brain, curiously acute after a week's exeat from the City, perpended many problems. He said to himself : "To-morrow, I'll telephone 111 Fifth Avenue. Monday, I'll call on them. Shall have to go rather gently. These Independents are suspicious blokes. If they think I'm

intriguing with the Trust, there'll be trouble. Confound 111 Fifth Avenue—I'm still thirty-four thousand dollars short of doubling my business—and only a month to go till the end of the year. There's no doubt that fellow Edgar's keeping us short on purpose."

Turning in, he thought vaguely of his wife, still more vaguely of his daughter. Somehow, the two seemed a long way away. . . . And yet, just before he fell into an easy sleep (it may even have been a dream, though one hesitates to connect such a practical youth with dreaming) it seemed to our Mr. Jackson as if, between Lowndes Square and Fifth Avenue, there stretched a long and iridescent rope which very much resembled a rope of pearls.

Morning, however, dissipated dreamery. It is not given to most Englishmen to appreciate New York; but Peter proved the exception. He loved that raucous city from the first crisp speech of the Custom House official, who said: "Britisher. That's all right," and passed his cabin-trunk out of the lettered sheds into the hubbub of the avenues.

"This," said our Mr. Jackson, as a taxi (whose dial showed the most preposterous figures) whisked him under the clanging "Elevated," through the little streets plastered with "Chop Suey" signs, into the stately centre of Manhattan Island, "this is IT."

And his hotel, the old Knickerbocker, did not dispel illusion. There was a "snap" ("pep," as an expression, had not yet been invented) about the Knickerbocker, which vastly delighted our Mr. Jackson. He told the proprietor so—being quite unaware that Mr. Regan could have bought out Jackson and Co. twice over—in his most patronizing Etonian manner, before he had been in the place two hours.

The week-end passed in a flash of electric trippery. Peter, already vastly more American than the barber who applied hot towels to his face, or the floor-clerk who answered his telephone, saw everything—the Flat-iron Building, Rector's, four department stores, a brace of theatres, a music-hall (which he learned to call a vaudeville), Broadway by night, Riverside Drive by day, the "Peacock Alley" at the Waldorf Astoria . . . and so many attractive young women that, faithful though he remained to her, even the American system of keeping cigars in plate-glass-and-porcelain humidors seemed scarcely worthy of mention in his first letter to Patricia.

By Monday midday our traveller was sufficiently wise about the place to find his way without inquiry to 111 Fifth Avenue. "And that"—as he himself phrased it—"put the lid on things."

Something about this vast commercial building, with its marble entrance, its speeding elevators, its huge open floor-spaces wherein clerks innumerable bent to polished desks under the flickering blue tubes of a just-invented lighting-system, fairly fascinated our Mr. Jackson. This, he felt, was the Home of Tobacco Business, with so big a "B" that the top semi-circle of that letter represented one world-hemisphere, and the bottom the other. Which is not to imply that a non-imaginative Englishman of the middle-classes condescended to display any open admiration, when he finally found himself face to face with the Treasurer of "Havana Cigar and Tobacco Factories, Inc."

"Glad to know you. Hope you had a good trip," said that worthy—a clean-shaven young man with gold eye-glasses and a winning smile. "How did you leave Thomas B. ? He writes that you English importers are the very devil."

"Does he ?" Peter, shifting his chair so that the window light should not fall on his face, glanced round the bare shining room. "That's what we say about him, you know."

They chipped each other, after the fashion of cigar men the world over, for a full two minutes. Then Peter said : "By the way, you seem to be very slow in shipping."

"I know." The treasurer's face fell sympathetically. "We're way behind on our European orders. Mr. Duke was saying so only yesterday. You're going on to Havana, aren't you ? I wish you'd tell the fellows down there how you feel about things. It may do them good ; put a bit of snap into them. You see," he went on, "this is only an accounting office. The real business is done down there."

"Not much change to be got out of this merchant," speculated the Englishman ; who knew quite enough about the methods of No. 111 to realize that the reference to "Mr. Duke" must be purest fiction ; and he went back to the Knickerbocker with his tail ever so slightly between his stocky legs.

Three more days in New York (on the last of which Maurice Beresford, homeward bound, took him to lunch at

"Martin's" and advised him "not to desert the Independent frying-pan for the Trust fire") did not raise our Englishman's tail to any appreciable extent.

Various gentlemen at No. 111 were suavity, hospitality itself; they wined him at their clubs, sent him more free cigars than even he could consume, dined him in a private room at the Holland House, where he discovered—to the tune of some eight hundred dollars—that his knowledge of poker had hitherto been based on entirely false premises; but resolutely declined to be drawn into any discussions on the "English situation," the which they declared to be entirely "up to" Thomas B. Edgar. One of the poker-players even went so far as to state: "Of course, we're mighty glad to make your acquaintance," here he added a small bunch from Peter's bank-roll to his own, "but if I were in your position, I wouldn't waste much time in New York. We believe in decentralization of effort. Edgar makes the running in England. Havana ships his importers the goods they want. *We*—just keep tab of what's happening."

Keeping tab on his own expenses, P. J. decided to quit Manhattan Island forthwith. From it he took only one scrap of comfort—a red book entitled: *The Science of Draw Poker*, by David A. Curtis, Poker Expert of the New York *Sun*.

To one chapter of that book, entitled "Personality in Poker," our Mr. Jackson devoted considerable attention during his three days' journey on the Ward Line's *Morro Castle* to Havana.

### VIII

For your tourist, Havana City is a hot-bed of romance. He, or she, adores the tropical warmth, the busy harbour, the curving sea-front, the palmy countrysides, the narrow street of "Obispo" where mantillaed *senoritas* stroll (and the unwary tourist is duly robbed by velvet-eyed storekeepers), the wheeled parades at sundown, and the mule-bells at midday. But to your cigar-man, Havana is a place in which to get busy.

And busy, from the very moment of his arrival, when friendly Cubans bore him off to a vast "breakfast" at the "Reguladora," Peter got. Here, there, everywhere—in "sorting-rooms," in bare tessellated offices, at private houses where one tilted till midnight in the hospitable rocking-chairs of Don Pancho or Señora Panchita (one eye on one's manners

and the other on the morrow's deal), in motor-cars or *coches*, at the "Paisaje" or the "Miramar"—you saw our Mr. Jackson, a "green" *Caxadores* mast-like between his teeth, his order-book in his pocket. . . . But only very rarely did you see him in the company of Cyrus P. Norman and his brother trustifiers of the industry at "Zulueta Uno."

For the situation, even as hinted by Maurice Beresford, required an infinity of tact. The smooth-voiced, small-handed Cubans who owned the Independent Factories distrusted not only "El Yanqui," but whosoever did too much business with "Los Yanquis": and it took a fortnight of lavish promises, backed by even more lavish orders, to restore their confidence; at the end of which fortnight arrived a cypher cablegram from Simpson: "If possible cancel Trust orders."

Peter, contenting himself with the laconic answer: "Why?" was met with: "Schornstein cutting prices to ribbons. Cannot compete unless we get rebate."

"Tom's a fool," thought Peter, considering that cable over his early coffee and the inevitable cigar. "One can't cancel orders here. And yet, in a way, Tom's right. It's the tenth of December; and we're still thirty thousand dollars short of doubling our Trust business. Blast the Trust! They've got me by the short hairs. They've done me out of—what's double fifty-seven thousand five hundred—a hundred and fifteen thousand dollars—what's ten per cent on a hundred and fifteen? They've done me out of eleven thousand five hundred dollars—two thousand three hundred quid." "And," added a sudden memory, "they've done Pat out of her pearl necklace!"

At that the boy's grey eyes darkled. He had been done, done brown. And by his own fault. He ought to have made a better contract; he ought to have kicked up hell with Edgar, hell in New York, hell with Cyrus P. Norman, the man on the spot. Instead—both in New York and in Havana—he had behaved as though the contract were not in existence.

"Always finessing," he decided. "That's me all over. Too much reticence. Those chaps at 111 knew exactly what I was after; I might just as well have been open with them. I'll tackle Norman about the thing to-day. If I can't get their money—at least I'll tell 'em what I think about them."

But the hatchet-faced Norman, when asked point-blank, "I say, have you had any advice from New York or London about a special arrangement with my firm?" professed the blandest ignorance. "My job," said Norman, "is to ship goods, not to sell 'em. What's your special arrangement anyway? And before I forget it—are you on for a poker session to-night?"

By some especial providence, the telephone-bell gave Peter a second's respite; and in that second he made up his mind that Norman was speaking the truth.

The rest of the happening, apparently, including the acceptance of the "poker session," was also in the hands of some especial providence—possibly of that particular providence which provides pretty women with pearl necklaces. . . .

## IX

"Those fellows in New York," said Cyrus P. Norman, "don't know the first thing about the game. You wait till we've got busy on you, Jackson."

They had just finished dinner at Norman's house in the Vedado, and were sitting down—six of them; Sol Lewis, a Chicago importer; Peter; Norman; Jake Garcia, a swash-buckling, black-moustached Cuban-American who ran, under Norman's guidance, three of the Trust cigar-factories; Norman's brother, hatchet-faced too, and brown-eyed under a thatch of unruly hair; and fat, prosperous Henry Stetson, who did the Trust's leaf-buying—to the accepted poker-session.

"Table-stakes," opined Henry Stetson. "A two hundred dollar table-stake. That's my limit."

"Does that mean," asked our Mr. Jackson, "that you can bet two hundred every hand?"

"Sure. If you've got it in front of you. Otherwise, you can buy another stack. You can buy ten stacks if you like. But you can't buy stacks in the middle of a deal. And you needn't buy more than one at a time. See!"

"Promises to be a nice cheap evening," decided Peter; and for two hours, holding on to Curtis as a drowning man to a life-buoy, he played so far under the odds of his hands that Sol Lewis, "seen" by a "full house" after one raise on threes, ejaculated:

"Say, Norman, you fellows don't seem to treat your English importers as good as us. You ought to make 'em raise your rebates, Mr. Jackson. Then you could raise me proper on three aces full of Lilies and Kates."

"He isn't one of *our* importers," laughed Norman senior. "Wish he were! He wouldn't play so tight then."

Both remarks irritated; nevertheless P. J. kept his temper—and that "self-control" which Curtis considers so essential to the game. But luck, and the whisky-decanter, coming his way, he began to open up.

The night was stifling. Outside, in the dusty garden, no breeze blew. Within, coats had been laid aside, collars taken off, shirt-sleeves rolled up. Already, the heavy Mexican dollars and the American V's of the party, had almost disappeared from the table. They played on credit now: Norman junior pencilling the scores.

And suddenly, luck began to veer; Peter's credits to dwindle. Sol Lewis took four hundred off him on a pat flush; Garcia annexed three—and a good deal of P. J.'s nerve—with a tiny full. The Norman brothers bluffed him out, once each, on nothing.

By the time they came to the last round, his winnings had entirely vanished, and a good hundred pounds of English money with them. He "bought" three stacks "for luck."

"Seems, after all, as though we might get enough British money to pay for our Christmas dinner," grinned Stetson, flicking round the cards.

Peter, picking up his hand, saw a pair of twos; threw them in; and repeated a similar self-control till the final deal. Then, on a pair of sevens, he made up his mind for a flutter if anyone opened the pot. After all—one might draw a third seven. Sevens had always been his lucky number. And anyway, he was bored stiff with doing nothing.

"She's loose. Fifty bucks," said Sol Lewis.

Stetson, left of the opener, dropped out. Young Norman, Garcia, and Norman senior came in. "Only one thing to be done here," thought P. J.; and after a pretended sorting of his cards, raised a hundred. The opener dropped out at once; Garcia, thinking things over, did likewise; but the two Normans stayed in and took a brace of cards each.

"How many for you, Mr. Jackson?" asked Garcia.

"Two," said Peter to his pair of sevens.

He did not look at the cards dealt him ; but laid all five face down on the table.

"Smudge the bet," announced both Normans ; and the elder added : "These English cigar-men are too tight for us poor fellows. How much does P. Jackson & Company propose betting ?"

"Go all I've got on these three aces," smiled P. J.

Norman junior consulted the tally-sheet ; and said : "You're good for three stacks including what you bought just now." Then, laughing, he went on : "I've not got such a bad-looking lot myself. You wouldn't care to take off the limit, I suppose."

Peter's eyes darkled. "Damn these Trust merchants," he thought. "First they rook me of an eleven thousand five hundred dollar rebate ; and now they're trying to bluff me out of this last pot. Wonder if, by any miracle, I improved."

But he dared not look at the hand which was supposed to hold three aces. It lay winking at him—five polished card-boards on the bare green wood of the poker-table.

"Take off the limit ?" prevaricated our Mr. Jackson. "That's not according to the rules, is it ?"

"Sure. It's the last hand of the evening. Never is a limit for the last hand, is there, Cy ?"

Cyrus P. Norman winked at his brother, and threw his hand in. Mart Norman and Peter eyed each other for fifteen full seconds. "Your bet," said Mart.

"If only he'd dropped out," thought Peter, "I'd have been quits on the evening !" Then, without the flicker of an eyelash, and in his usual voice, he challenged : "Take off the limit if you like—but, if you do, it'll cost you two thousand dollars to look at these five cards."

"Cheap at the price," snapped the American ; and, without waiting for his right to see, laid four twos face-up on the table.

For the fraction of a second Peter's heart went stone cold. to lose five hundred pounds, in one evening, had been the act of a lunatic. Five hundred quid—why, that was very nearly enough to buy . . . a pearl necklace !

"Turn 'em over, Mr. Jackson," said Sol Lewis. "You might have bought that fourth ace."

"Ace," laughed Peter (the laugh cost a bit of an effort, but he managed it somehow). "I came in on a pair of sevens. Here they are." And one by one, very slowly, he turned over



his cards ; the ace he had held up, the seven of diamonds, the seven of clubs. . . .

As he lifted the fourth card and saw the seven of spades, even our Mr. Jackson's fingers trembled. Was the fifth card, by some miracle, also a . . .

"Go on," said a voice—Stetson's, "turn it up"; but already, Jake Garcia, quite unable to contain himself, had exposed the fifth card.

And the fifth card was the seven of hearts !

"Well"—Mart, as a good loser, had few equals and no superiors—"it looks to me as though I hadn't won." He turned away, and busied himself with the score sheet. As he did so, his face, in the shadow of the lampshade, showed a little pale.

But the rest of the Americans were not looking at Mart. They were looking at Peter, patting him on the back, offering him drinks, cigars.

"Gee !" said Cyrus P. Norman. "You've got some nerve. If only you ordered cigars from us, same way as you buy cards, we'd pay off our seven per cent Gold Bonds a year before they fell due."

"But I do order cigars from you." For once in a way, our Mr. Jackson felt strangely above himself. "If only you'd ship 'em to me."

"Ship 'em to you ?" Mart, his calculations finished, his face nearly composed, turned back to the table. "We ship goods as fast as anyone in this island."

"Sure," asseverated Garcia. "We can ship a hundred thousand dollars' worth of goods a week, easy."

Stetson chimed in. "It's a real pity you're not on our side, Mr. Jackson. We could do with a man of your snap in the English market."

It was then, quite suddenly, that the especial providence showed P. J. his "Mrs." She was sitting, all by herself, in the rather prim drawing-room of Lowndes Square. A *décolleté* gown revealed the glimmer of her white skin. Her lips, parted to a smile, seemed trying to frame a word. . . .

But whether that word was his own name or some other single syllable beginning with pe——, our Mr. Jackson had

no time to determine : for the providential vision vanished abruptly as it had appeared, leaving only an idea, the craziest, most startling of ideas, behind it.

"Why, last week," went on Garcia, "I filled the old *Morro Castle* so full of our goods that they had to raise her Plimsoll mark three feet," and he laughed, twirling his black moustachios.

"That's the way we do business," confirmed Norman. "Hustle. That's the rule at Zulueta Uno."

The idea grew ; till it appeared to the five as though the Englishman had lost all interest in the cigar-business. His eyes held a far-away look, as though he were trying to remember something. Peter Jackson *was* trying to remember something : and the something, as written by Curtis, reads thus : "The necessity for an understanding of human nature . . . is what raises poker above the level of other card games. . . it is a very high-class training . . . for the man of the world."

"Hustle !" he said at last. "Hustle ! Why, there isn't an Independent on this island who can't ship quicker than your people."

Cyrus P. Norman's brown eyes lit. "You try us with a fifty thousand dollar order, and see," he snapped—obviously stung.

"Get the goods by the year after next, wouldn't I ?" grinned Peter. "No, sir !" (This was a flagrant Americanism.) "We give our orders where we get served quickest. I told Edgar that, months ago."

"Edgar's got nothing to do with the shipping," barked Mart, losing interest in the score-sheet. "Cy. and I look after that end."

"Is that so ?" drawled Peter. "Is that really so ? How very interesting. Then perhaps *you* can tell me why"—he hesitated, took his risk—"you've got thirty thousand dollars' worth of goods pending for my account since last July."

Mart, cornered (for his instructions had been the definite : "All orders for Schornsteins take precedence English market"), made a bluff.

"An order for thirty thousand dollars is only chicken-food to Zulueta Uno," said Mart.

"That's a good one," remarked Peter.

"Good one ! How do you mean ?"

"What I say."

"You don't believe me?"

"Of course I believe you. I believe you so much that"—Sol Lewis, watching closely, could have sworn that the Englishman's laugh was genuine—"that I'll lay you everything I've won to-night you can't ship those thirty-thousand dollars' worth of goods by the end of the month."

"And the Schornstein orders went off last week," thought Mart. "I've got him! Gee, but I've got him!" He looked at Cy., who winked; at Jake, who knew nothing about Edgar's cable; at Stetson; at Sol, who—as a loyal Trust man—must be properly impressed before returning to Chicago.

"Dollar for dollar, Jackson," said Mart, "I'll go you that bet. And what's more, if your orders are for stock sizes I'll guarantee to ship them this Friday."

Peter's heart gave a great thump as he answered:

"Very well, then. That's a bet. If you ship the goods, we're quits on to-night. If you don't—you'll owe me four thousand dollars."

Some three-quarters of an hour later, listening to the purr of the tropic sea below his windows at the "Miramar," our Mr. Jackson wrote the following cryptic figures in the last page of his order-book:

"\$4,000 at 4.80 £str. 830 about.

\$11,500 „ „ £str. 2,300 about.

Mem: Cable Simpson have not cancelled orders.

Query: How dear are pearls in New York?"

# X

On the twenty-seventh morning of a foggy December in the far-away nineteen-hundreds, a tall, blue-eyed, golden-haired girl watched the *Lusitania's* high bow spire up through the rain-drizzle of Liverpool harbour and swing slow to land. . . . On the afternoon of that same twenty-seventh December day, she sat alone with a rather *distrain* husband in their reserved compartment on the boat-train. . . . "Naturally," thought Patricia, "I didn't expect him to kiss me in public; but here—well once—I think he ought to."

"Enjoyed your lunch, old thing?" asked the rather *distract* husband.

"Yes, dear. Very much."

"Mind if I light a cigar?"

"Of course not. Are you glad to be home?"

"Rather." Peter clipped his cigar; lit up; and gazed at his wife through the smoke-clouds.

"And you're pleased with your trip?"

"Quite. Though I don't know what Simpson will say about my buying." The grey eyes twinkled. "Do you know, we had thirty thousand dollars' worth of goods on the *Lusitania*. All Trust stuff, too. I made the purser show me the Bills of Lading when I went to his office this morning to fetch——"

Patricia noticed the stop in his voice; and asked—in the perfunctory manner of the dutiful wife: "What *did* you go to the purser's office to fetch, Peter?"

"Oh, nothing," said Mr. Jackson. "Only this."

He fumbled among the folds of his fur coat; extracted a sealed parcel; took a knife from his waistcoat pocket; slit the sealed string; and handed her a flat red-leather case, about eight inches long, stamped "Tiffany."

"Open it yourself," said our Mr. Jackson.

Patricia sat an appreciable while—her eyes very happy—before she pressed the catch of that case. But when at last she did press it, when she saw the white velvet, and that which glittered on the white velvet, her mind—her average English middle-class mind—knew the worst foreboding of its married years.

"Peter!" she gasped. "Peter! You—you haven't been unfaithful to me? . . ."

Peter's answer, and the rest of their journey, in the interests of commercial morality, are left unrecorded.



MRS. GASKELL

*A Love Affair*  
from  
*Cranford*

Elizabeth Gaskell became famous with the publication of her novel *Mary Barton*, which was highly praised by Carlyle and other critics of the time. She is chiefly remembered to-day for *Cranford*, a delightful study of life in a small country town, inspired by her early days at Knutsford in Cheshire.



## A LOVE AFFAIR

AND *now* I come to the love affair.

It seems that Miss Pole had a cousin, once or twice removed, who had offered to Miss Matty long ago. Now this cousin lived four or five miles from Cranford on his own estate ; but his property was not large enough to entitle him to rank higher than a yeoman ; or rather, with something of the "pride which apes humility," he had refused to push himself on, as so many of his class had done, into the ranks of the squires. He would not allow himself to be called Thomas Holbrook, *Esq.* ; he even sent back letters with this address, telling the postmistress at Cranford that his name was *Mr.* Thomas Holbrook, yeoman. He rejected all domestic innovations ; he would have the house door stand open in summer and shut in winter, without knocker or bell to summon a servant. The closed fist or the knob of the stick did this office for him if he found the door locked. He despised every refinement which had not its root deep down in humanity. If people were not ill, he saw no necessity for moderating his voice. He spoke the dialect of the country in perfection, and constantly used it in conversation ; although Miss Pole (who gave me these particulars) added, that he read aloud more beautifully and with more feeling than any one she had ever heard, except the late rector.

"And how came Miss Matilda not to marry him?" asked I.

"Oh, I don't know. She was willing enough, I think ; but you know Cousin Thomas would not have been enough of a gentleman for the rector and Miss Jenkyns."

"Well, but they were not to marry him," said I impatiently.

"No ; but they did not like Miss Matty to marry below her rank. You know she was the rector's daughter, and somehow they are related to Sir Peter Arley : Miss Jenkyns thought a deal of that."

"Poor Miss Matty !" said I.

"Nay, now, I don't know anything more than that he



offered and was refused. Miss Matty might not like him—and Miss Jenkyns might never have said a word—it is only a guess of mine.”

“Has she never seen him since?” I inquired.

“No, I think not. You see, Woodley, Cousin Thomas’s house, lies half-way between Cranford and Misselton; and I know he made Misselton his market town very soon after he had offered to Miss Matty; and I don’t think he has been into Cranford above once or twice since—once, when I was walking with Miss Matty, in High Street, and suddenly she darted from me, and went up Shire Lane. A few minutes after I was startled by meeting Cousin Thomas.”

“How old is he?” I asked, after a pause of castle-building.

“He must be about seventy, I think, my dear,” said Miss Pole, blowing up my castle, as if by gunpowder, into small fragments.

Very soon after—at least during my long visit to Miss Matilda—I had the opportunity of seeing Mr. Holbrook; seeing, too, his first encounter with his former love, after thirty or forty years’ separation. I was helping to decide whether any of the new assortment of coloured silks which they had just received at the shop would do to match a grey and black mousseline-de-laine that wanted a new breadth, when a tall, thin, Don Quixote-looking old man came into the shop for some woollen gloves. I had never seen the person (who was rather striking) before, and I watched him rather attentively while Miss Matty listened to the shopman. The stranger wore a blue coat with brass buttons, drab breeches, and gaiters, and drummed with his fingers on the counter until he was attended to. When he answered the shop-boy’s question, “What can I have the pleasure of showing you to-day, sir?” I saw Miss Matilda start, and then suddenly sit down; and instantly I guessed who it was. She had made some inquiry which had to be carried round to the other shopman.

“Miss Jenkyns wants the black sarsanet two-and-twopence the yard”; and Mr. Holbrook had caught the name, and was across the shop in two strides.

“Matty—Miss Matilda—Miss Jenkyns! God bless my soul! I should not have known you. How are you—how are you?” He kept shaking her hand in a way which proved the warmth of his friendship; but he repeated so often, as if

to himself, "I should not have known you!" that any sentimental romance which I might be inclined to build was quite done away with by his manner.

However, he kept talking to us all the time we were in the shop; and then waving the shopman with the unpurchased gloves on one side, with "Another time, sir, another time!" he walked home with us. I am happy to say my client, Miss Matilda, also left the shop in an equally bewildered state, not having purchased either green or red silk. Mr. Holbrook was evidently full with honest, loud-spoken joy at meeting his old love again; he touched on the changes that had taken place; he even spoke of Miss Jenkyns as "Your poor sister! Well, well, we have all our faults!" and bade us good-bye with many a hope that he should soon see Miss Matty again. She went straight to her room, and never came back till our early tea-time, when I thought she looked as if she had been crying.

A few days after, a note came from Mr. Holbrook, asking us—impartially asking both of us—in a formal, old-fashioned style, to spend a day at his house—a long June day—for it was June now. He named that he had also invited his cousin, Miss Pole; so that we might join in a fly, which could be put up at his house.

I expected Miss Matty to jump at this invitation; but, no! Miss Pole and I had the greatest difficulty in persuading her to go. She thought it was improper; and was even half annoyed when we utterly ignored the idea of any impropriety in her going with two other ladies to see her old lover. Then came a more serious difficulty. She did not think Deborah would have liked her to go. This took us half a day's good hard talking to get over; but, at the first sentence of relenting, I seized the opportunity, and wrote and dispatched an acceptance in her name—fixing day and hour, that all might be decided and done with.

The next morning she asked me if I would go down to the shop with her; and there, after much hesitation, we chose out three caps to be sent home and tried on, that the most becoming might be selected to take with us on Thursday.

She was in a state of silent agitation all the way to Woodley. She had evidently never been there before; and, although she little dreamt I knew anything of her early story, I could perceive she was in a tremor at the thought of seeing the place

which might have been her home, and round which it is probable that many of her innocent girlish imaginations had clustered. It was a long drive there, through paved, jolting lanes. Miss Matilda sat bolt upright, and looked wistfully out of the windows as we drew near the end of our journey. The aspect of the country was quiet and pastoral. Woodley stood among fields; and there was an old-fashioned garden where roses and currant-bushes touched each other, and where the feathery asparagus formed a pretty background to the pinks and gillyflowers; there was no drive up to the door. We got out at a little gate, and walked up a straight box-edged path.

"My cousin might make a drive, I think," said Miss Pole, who was afraid of ear-ache, and had only her cap on.

"I think it is very pretty," said Miss Matty, with a soft plaintiveness in her voice, and almost in a whisper, for just then Mr. Holbrook appeared at the door, rubbing his hands in very effervescence of hospitality. He looked more like my idea of Don Quixote than ever, and yet the likeness was only external. His respectable housekeeper stood modestly at the door to bid us welcome; and, while she led the elder ladies upstairs to a bedroom, I begged to look about the garden. My request evidently pleased the old gentleman, who took me all round the place, and showed me his six-and-twenty cows, named after the different letters of the alphabet. As we went along, he surprised me occasionally by repeating apt and beautiful quotations from the poets, ranging easily from Shakespeare and George Herbert to those of our own day. He did this as naturally as if he were thinking aloud, and their true and beautiful words were the best expression he could find for what he was thinking or feeling. To be sure he called Byron "my Lord Býrron," and pronounced the name of Goethe strictly in accordance with the English sound of the letters—"As Goëthe says, 'Ye ever-verdant palaces,' " etc. Altogether, I never met with a man, before or since, who had spent so long a life in a secluded and not impressive country, with ever-increasing delight in the daily and yearly change of season and beauty.

When he and I went in, we found that dinner was nearly ready in the kitchen—for so I suppose the room ought to be called, as there were oak dressers and cupboards all round, all over by the side of the fireplace, and only a small Turkey

carpet in the middle of the flag-floor. The room might have been easily made into a handsome dark oak dining-parlour by removing the oven and a few other appurtenances of a kitchen, which were evidently never used, the real cooking-place being at some distance. The room in which we were expected to sit was a stiffly-furnished, ugly apartment ; but that in which we did sit was what Mr. Holbrook called the counting-house, when he paid his labourers their weekly wages at a great desk near the door. The rest of the pretty sitting-room—looking into the orchard, and all covered over with dancing tree-shadows—was filled with books. They lay on the ground, they covered the walls, they strewed the table. He was evidently half ashamed and half proud of his extravagance in this respect. They were of all kinds—poetry and wild, weird tales prevailing. He evidently chose his books in accordance with his own tastes, not because such and such were classical or established favourites.

“ Ah ! ” he said, “ we farmers ought not to have much time for reading ; yet somehow one can’t help it.”

“ What a pretty room ! ” said Miss Matty, *sotto voce*.

“ What a pleasant place ! ” said I aloud, almost simultaneously.

“ Nay ! if you like it,” replied he ; “ but can you sit on these great black leather three-cornered chairs ? I like it better than the best parlour ; but I thought ladies would take that for the smarter place.”

It was the smarter place, but, like most smart things, not at all pretty, or pleasant, or homelike ; so, while we were at dinner, the servant girl dusted and scrubbed the counting-house chairs, and we sat there all the rest of the day.

We had pudding before meat ; and I thought Mr. Holbrook was going to make some apology for his old-fashioned ways, for he began :

“ I don’t know whether you like new-fangled ways.”

“ Oh, not at all ! ” said Miss Matty.

“ No more do I,” said he. “ My housekeeper *will* have these in her new fashion ; or else I tell her that, when I was a young man, we used to keep strictly to my father’s rule, ‘ No broth, no ball ; no ball, no beef ; ’ and always began dinner with broth. Then we had suet puddings, boiled in the broth with the beef ; and then the meat itself. If we did not sup our broth, we had no ball, which we liked a deal better ; and the

beef came last of all, and only those had it who had done justice to the broth and the ball. Now folks begin with sweet things, and turn their dinners topsy-turvy."

When the ducks and green peas came, we looked at each other in dismay; we had only two-pronged, black-handled forks. It is true the steel was as bright as silver; but what were we to do? Miss Matty picked up her peas, one by one, on the point of the prongs, much as Aminé ate her grains of rice after her previous feast with the Ghoul. Miss Pole sighed over her delicate young peas as she left them on one side of her plate untasted, for they *would* drop between the prongs. I looked at my host: the peas were going wholesale into his capacious mouth, shovelled up by his large, round-ended knife. I saw, I imitated, I survived! My friends, in spite of my precedent, could not muster up courage enough to do an ungenteel thing; and, if Mr. Holbrook had not been so heartily hungry, he would probably have seen that the good peas went away almost untouched.

After dinner, a clay pipe was brought in, and a spittoon; and, asking us to retire to another room, where he would soon join us, if we disliked tobacco smoke, he presented his pipe to Miss Matty, and requested her to fill the bowl. This was a compliment to a lady in his youth; but it was rather inappropriate to propose it as an honour to Miss Matty, who had been trained by her sister to hold smoking of every kind in utter abhorrence. But if it was a shock to her refinement, it was also a gratification to her feelings to be thus selected; so she daintily stuffed the strong tobacco into the pipe, and then we withdrew.

"It is very pleasant dining with a bachelor," said Miss Matty softly, as we settled ourselves in the counting-house. "I only hope it is not improper; so many pleasant things are!"

"What a number of books he has!" said Miss Pole, looking round the room. "And how dusty they are!"

"I think it must be like one of the great Dr. Johnson's rooms," said Miss Matty. "What a superior man your cousin must be!"

"Yes!" said Miss Pole, "he's a great reader; but I am afraid he has got into very uncouth habits with living alone."

"Oh, uncouth is too hard a word. I should call him eccentric; very clever people always are!" replied Miss Matty.

When Mr. Holbrook returned, he proposed a walk in the fields ; but the two elder ladies were afraid of damp and dirt, and had only very unbecoming calashes to put on over their caps ; so they declined, and I was again his companion in a turn which he said he was obliged to take to see after his men. He strode along, either wholly forgetting my existence, or soothed into silence by his pipe—and yet it was not silence exactly. He walked before me, with a stooping gait, his hands clasped behind him ; and, as some tree or cloud, or glimpse of distant upland pastures, struck him, he quoted poetry to himself, saying it out loud in a grand, sonorous voice, with just the emphasis that true feeling and appreciation give. We came upon an old cedar tree, which stood at one end of the house—

“The cedar spreads his dark-green layers of shade.”

“Capital term—‘layers!’ Wonderful man!” I did not know whether he was speaking to me or not ; but I put in an assenting “wonderful,” although I knew nothing about it, just because I was tired of being forgotten, and of being consequently silent.

He turned sharp round. “Ay ! you may say ‘wonderful.’ Why, when I saw the review of his poems in *Blackwood*, I set off within an hour, and walked seven miles to Misselton (for the horses were not in the way) and ordered them. Now, what colour are ash-buds in March ?”

Is the man going mad ? thought I. He is very like Don Quixote.

“What colour are they, I say ?” repeated he vehemently.

“I am sure I don’t know, sir,” said I, with the meekness of ignorance.

“I knew you didn’t. No more did I—an old fool that I am !—till this young man comes and tells me. Black as ash-buds in March. And I’ve lived all my life in the country ; more shame for me not to know. Black : they are jet-black, madam.” And he went off again, swinging along to the music of some rhyme he had got hold of.

When we came back, nothing would serve him but he must read us the poems he had been speaking of ; and Miss Pole encouraged him in his proposal, I thought, because she wished me to hear his beautiful reading, of which she had boasted ; but she afterwards said it was because she had got to a difficult

part of her crochet, and wanted to count her stitches without having to talk. Whatever he had proposed would have been right to Miss Matty ; although she did fall sound asleep within five minutes after he had begun a long poem, called " Locksley Hall," and had a comfortable nap, unobserved, till he ended ; when the cessation of his voice wakened her up, and she said, feeling that something was expected, and that Miss Pole was counting,—

" What a pretty book ! "

" Pretty, madam ! it's beautiful ! Pretty, indeed ! "

" Oh yes ! I meant beautiful ! " said she, fluttered at his disapproval of her word. " It is so like that beautiful poem of Dr. Johnson's my sister used to read—I forget the name of it ; what was it, my dear ? " turning to me.

" Which do you mean, ma'am ? What was it about ? "

" I don't remember what it was about, and I've quite forgotten what the name of it was ; but it was written by Dr. Johnson, and was very beautiful, and very like what Mr. Holbrook has just been reading."

" I don't remember it," said he reflectively. " But I don't know Dr. Johnson's poems well. I must read them."

As we were getting into the fly to return, I heard Mr. Holbrook say he should call on the ladies soon, and inquire how they got home ; and this evidently pleased and fluttered Miss Matty at the time he said it ; but after we had lost sight of the old house among the trees her sentiments towards the master of it were gradually absorbed into a distressing wonder as to whether Martha had broken her word, and seized on the opportunity of her mistress's absence to have a " follower." Martha looked good, and steady, and composed enough, as she came to help us out ; she was always careful of Miss Matty, and to-night she made use of this unlucky speech :

" Eh, dear ma'am, to think of your going out in an evening in such a thin shawl ! It's no better than muslin. At your age, ma'am, you should be careful."

" My age ! " said Miss Matty, almost speaking crossly, for her, for she was usually gentle—" My age ! Why, how old do you think I am, that you talk about my age ? "

" Well, ma'am, I should say you were not far short of sixty ; but folks' looks is often against them—and I'm sure I meant no harm."

" Martha, I'm not yet fifty-two ! " said Miss Matty, with

grave emphasis ; for probably the remembrance of her youth had come very vividly before her this day, and she was annoyed at finding that golden time so far away in the past.

But she never spoke of any former and more intimate acquaintance with Mr. Holbrook. She had probably met with so little sympathy in her early love that she had shut it up close in her heart ; and it was only by a sort of watching, which I could hardly avoid since Miss Pole's confidence, that I saw how faithful her poor heart had been in its sorrow and its silence.

She gave me some good reason for wearing her best cap every day, and sat near the window, in spite of her rheumatism, in order to see, without being seen, down into the street.

He came. He put his open palms upon his knees, which were far apart, as he sat with his head bent down, whistling, after we had replied to his inquiries about our safe return. Suddenly he jumped up.

"Well, madam, have you any commands for Paris ? I am going there in a week or two."

"To Paris !" we both exclaimed.

"Yes, madam. I've never been there, and always had a wish to go ; and I think if I don't go soon, I mayn't go at all ; so as soon as the hay is got in I shall go, before harvest time."

We were so much astonished that we had no commissions.

Just as he was going out of the room, he turned back, with his favourite exclamation :

"God bless my soul, madam, but I nearly forgot half my errand. Here are the poems for you you admired so much the other evening at my house." He tugged away at a parcel in his coat-pocket. "Good-bye, miss," said he ; "good-bye, Matty ; take care of yourself." And he was gone. But he had given her a book, and he had called her Matty, just as he used to do thirty years ago.

"I wish he would not go to Paris," said Miss Matilda anxiously. "I don't believe frogs will agree with him ; he used to have to be very careful what he ate, which was curious in so strong-looking a young man."

Soon after this I took my leave, giving many an injunction to Martha to look after her mistress, and to let me know if she thought that Miss Matilda was not so well ; in which case I would volunteer a visit to my old friend, without noticing Martha's intelligence to her.



Accordingly I received a line or two from Martha every now and then ; and, about November, I had a note to say her mistress was " very low and sadly off her food " ; and the account made me so uneasy that, although Martha did not decidedly summon me, I packed up my things and went.

I received a warm welcome, in spite of the little flurry produced by my impromptu visit, for I had only been able to give a day's notice. Miss Matilda looked miserably ill ; and I prepared to comfort and cosset her.

I went down to have a private talk with Martha.

" How long has your mistress been so poorly ? " I asked, as I stood by the kitchen fire.

" Well, I think it's better than a fortnight ; it is, I know. It was one Tuesday, after Miss Pole had been that she went into this moping way. I thought she was tired, and it would go off with a night's rest ; but no ! she has gone on and on ever since, till I thought it my duty to write you, ma'am."

" You did quite right, Martha. It is a comfort to think she has so faithful a servant about her. And I hope you find your place comfortable ? "

" Well, ma'am, missus is very kind, and there's plenty to eat and drink, and no more work but what I can do easily—but——" Martha hesitated.

" But what, Martha ? "

" Why, it seems so hard of missus not to let me have any followers ; there's such lots of young fellows in the town ; and many a one has as much as offered to keep company with me ; and I may never be in such a likely place again, and it's like wasting an opportunity. Many a girl as I know would have 'em unbeknownst to missus ; but I've given my word, and I'll stick to it ; or else this is just the house for missus never to be the wiser if they did come : and it's such a capable kitchen—there's such good dark corners in it—I'd be bound to hide any one. I counted up last Sunday night—for I'll not deny I was crying because I had to shut the door in Jem Hearn's face, and he's a steady young man, fit for any girl ; only I had given missus my word." Martha was all but crying again ; and I had little comfort to give her, for I knew, from old experience, of the horror with which both the Miss Jenkynses looked upon " followers " ; and in Miss Matty's present nervous state this dread was not likely to be lessened.

I went to see Miss Pole the next day, and took her completely by surprise, for she had not been to see Miss Matilda for two days.

"And now I must go back with you, my dear, for I promised to let her know how Thomas Holbrook went on; and, I'm sorry to say, his housekeeper has sent me word to-day that he hasn't long to live. Poor Thomas! that journey to Paris was quite too much for him. His housekeeper says he has hardly ever been round his fields since, but just sits with his hands on his knees in the counting-house, not reading or anything, but only saying what a wonderful city Paris was! Paris has much to answer for if it's killed my Cousin Thomas, for a better man never lived."

"Does Miss Matilda know of his illness?" asked I, a new light as to the cause of her indisposition dawning upon me.

"Dear, to be sure, yes! Has not she told you? I let her know a fortnight ago, or more, when first I heard of it. How odd she shouldn't have told you!"

Not at all, I thought; but I did not say anything. I felt almost guilty of having spied too curiously into that tender heart, and I was not going to speak of its secrets—hidden, Miss Matty believed, from all the world. I ushered Miss Pole into Miss Matilda's little drawing-room, and then left them alone. But I was not surprised when Martha came to my bedroom door, to ask me to go down to dinner alone, for that missus had one of her bad headaches. She came into the drawing-room at tea-time, but it was evidently an effort to her; and, as if to make up for some reproachful feeling against her late sister, Miss Jenkyns, which had been troubling her all the afternoon, and for which she now felt penitent, she kept telling me how good and how clever Deborah was in her youth; how she used to settle what gowns they were to wear at all the parties (faint, ghostly ideas of grim parties, far away in the distance, when Miss Matty and Miss Pole were young!); and how Deborah and her mother had started the benefit society for the poor, and taught girls cooking and plain sewing; and how Deborah had once danced with a lord; and how she used to visit at Sir Peter Arley's, and try to remodel the quiet rectory establishment on the plans of Arley Hall, where they kept thirty servants; and how she had nursed Miss Matty through a long, long illness, of which I had never heard before, but which I now dated in my own

mind as following the dismissal of the suit of Mr. Holbrook. So we talked softly and quietly of old times through the long November evening.

The next day Miss Pole brought us word that Mr. Holbrook was dead. Miss Matty heard the news in silence ; in fact, from the account of the previous day, it was only what we had to expect. Miss Pole kept calling upon us for some expression of regret, by asking if it was not sad that he was gone, and saying :

“ To think of that pleasant day last June, when he seemed so well ! And he might have lived this dozen years if he had not gone to that wicked Paris, where they are always having revolutions.”

She paused for some demonstration on our part. I saw Miss Matty could not speak, she was trembling so nervously ; so I said what I really felt : and after a call of some duration—all the time of which I have no doubt Miss Pole thought Miss Matty received the news very calmly—our visitor took her leave.

Miss Matty made a strong effort to conceal her feelings—a concealment she practised even with me, for she has never alluded to Mr. Holbrook again, although the book he gave her lies with her Bible on the little table by her bedside. She did not think I heard her when she asked the little milliner of Cranford to make her caps something like the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson’s, or that I noticed the reply :

“ But she wears widows’ caps, ma’am ! ”

“ Oh ! I only meant something in that style ; not widow’s, of course, but rather like Mrs. Jamieson’s.”

This effort at concealment was the beginning of the tremulous motion of head and hands which I have seen ever since in Miss Matty.

The evening of the day on which we heard of Mr. Holbrook’s death, Miss Matilda was very silent and thoughtful ; after prayers she called Martha back, and then she stood, uncertain what to say.

“ Martha ! ” she said at last, “ you are young,” and then she made so long a pause that Martha, to remind her of her half-finished sentence, dropped a curtsy, and said :

“ Yes, please, ma’am ; two-and-twenty last third of October, please, ma’am.”

“ And, perhaps, Martha, you may some time meet with a

young man you like, and who likes you. I did say you were not to have followers ; but if you meet with such a young man, and tell me, and I find he is respectable, I have no objection to his coming to see you once a week. God forbid !” said she, in a low voice, “that I should grieve any young hearts.” She spoke as if she were providing for some distant contingency, and was rather startled when Martha made her ready eager answer.

“Please, ma’am, there’s Jem Hearn, and he’s a joiner making three-and-sixpence a day, and six foot one in his stocking-feet, please, ma’am ; and if you’ll ask about him to-morrow morning, every one will give him a character for steadiness ; and he’ll be glad enough to come to-morrow night, I’ll be bound.”

Though Miss Matty was startled, she submitted to Fate and Love.



MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES

*A Perfect Wife*

Mrs. Belloc Lowndes is nearly as prolific a writer as her brother, Hilaire Belloc, and has published over thirty books, including many studies of the weird and supernatural. Her latest novels are *Love Is a Flame* and *Jenny Newstead*.



## A PERFECT WIFE

### I

“**W**AITING for your happy husband, my dear ? ”

Ella Sand smiled down into the kind old face of her neighbour. “ Yes, he’ll be here in a minute or two.” She added, with a touch of real feeling in her confident voice : “ I’m glad you think he’s happy, Mrs Webb.”

“ Happy ? ” echoed the older woman, “ I think your Peter is the happiest man I know. Not but what I think you’re happy and lucky, too. I hope you touch wood sometimes ? It isn’t many women who, in addition to everything else, are famous, too. Look at this ! ”

The old lady took a newspaper cutting out of her silk bag and Mrs. Sand glanced at it, well pleased. It was headed, “ *A Beautiful Lady Ace*,” and began : “ Beauty and athletics rarely go hand-in-hand, but Mrs. Ella Sand, who has burst like a star on the international flying world, is a very lovely woman.”

As Mrs. Webb took back the cutting, she exclaimed : “ How you manage to be at the same time such a clever housewife and delightful hostess amazes me——”

“ I’ve always had what people call a tidy mind. Why, I’ve even succeeded in making Peter tidy ! The only serious tiff we’ve ever had was when I made him turn a lot of dirty old books he’d had as a boy out of his study. But I can’t get him to be smart about his clothes. Look at the horrid old panama hat he *will* wear motoring ! ”

“ Are you going to stay at home a bit now ? ”

“ Well, you can’t be what that paper calls a ‘ Lady Ace ’ without gadding about a good bit. I know you think me a bad wife—— ? ”

“ The proof of the pudding is in the eating,” answered the old lady, smiling. “ Peter’s remained your lover, as well as your husband, and yet you’ve been married—let me see—— ? ”

“ Ten years and three months,” said Ella Sand quickly.

“ I take it that Peter never complains, eh ? ”

Mrs. Sand reddened, and it made her look prettier than



ever. "Complains? Why he's ever so proud of my flying. He gave the office a whole holiday when I won 'The Amateur Moth Owners' Trophy.'"

She hesitated, then added, soberly: "Without talking about it, I always *do* consider Peter. In between my flying bouts I *am* a home bird!"

"Come, come," the old woman laughed aloud, "you mustn't make yourself out as a greater wonder than you are! All your heart's in the sky. Why, I never hear that *hum, hum, hum*, without thinking of *you*."

Ella Sand looked, and felt, really hurt.

"All my heart is Peter's, Mrs. Webb, though you mayn't believe it."

There was a pause, and then Mrs. Webb said slowly: "If you had children, your life and Peter's, too, would be very different."

"Then I'm glad we haven't children! I've never felt the slightest wish to have a baby."

"That's the only real quarrel I have with you, my dear. Well, give my love to Peter. I suppose you're glad *his* mother had a baby?"

"Well, yes, I admit that I'm glad of that!"

Ella Sand shut the gate on her visitor, and walked quickly along the rose-covered pergola leading to the door into the house.

Like everything else in the planning of which she had had a hand, the miniature aerodrome was perfect of its kind. Indeed, amateur airmen would come a long way to see it. Peter Sand was a rich man, and he had given his wife *caï'n blanche*. So the ten-acre field had been flattened at considerable cost. Hospitable flares were lit each night, to help aerial navigators who might be in trouble, and—a truly feminine touch this—the flying ground was surrounded by a splendid herbaceous border. As for the actual home of Ella Sand's cherished aeroplanes—she had two—the long, curiously shaped, barrel-like building abutted on the aerodrome, and was next the charming cottages in one of which her mechanic lived with his wife, while the other was occupied by Jackson, the chauffeur.

Ella Sand could not have told you why she had taken to flying. But once she had ~~done~~ so, it had come as naturally to her as to a bird, and, very soon, she had become, in a sense,

world famous. But even her most grudging critics would have told you that she was not at all "spoilt."

To-day Ella looked a delightful, cool-looking figure in her cream silk knitted frock; and, as the big yellow motor her husband always drove himself, swung through the open gate, he called out, cheerily: "I hope I haven't kept you waiting, darling?" And then, as he jumped out, he added: "You know I'm starting again at four o'clock? Worse luck!"

She linked her arm through his, and, as soon as they had closed the garden door, put up her face to be kissed. It was a daily ritual which neither of them ever forgot.

As he followed her into his deliciously cool house, Peter Sand gave a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad I came out," he said, as if thinking aloud. "These city restaurants are beastly in July."

"You needn't start till six; it will be cooler then," she exclaimed.

He shook his head. "I'd rather get off at four. Besides, you'll have Lucy Cranston here."

"She's chucked me."

He looked suddenly concerned. "Too bad!"

"I don't mind a bit. It will be nice to have a quiet three days to myself."

She smiled gaily, and her husband told himself that she was still a most beautiful woman. Her auburn hair was as bright, her complexion as delicately brilliant, her figure as slight and supple as the day he, proudest, most exultant of men, had married her.

"I wonder if I've time to change," he said presently.

"I'm sure you have. Run along, and I'll stop cook starting our omelette."

Ella knew quite well that cook *had* started the omelette. But what were half a dozen eggs compared to Peter's comfort?

Peter looked a bit tired to-day. Was he overworking—not giving himself enough time for the golf, which was the only game he really enjoyed.

She had soothed cook's outraged feelings, and was already back in her flower-scented, darkened drawing-room, before her husband joined her. But as they both sat down at their cosy round dining-table, she was struck anew by his look of fatigue, and, yes, of depression.

"You don't look the thing at all, Peter! Why not stop

here till Sunday, and have a cool night journey? Why travel by road over the week-end? Motoring's all very well——"

He looked up. "Motoring's the only thing I like," he said abruptly.

She knew that wasn't true, but all she said was: "I do hope that you're taking Jackson this time, at any rate? You look done in, old man."

And then, at last, he smiled across at her. "I like driving alone. I'm really all right, old girl."

"Old man," "old girl," little secret, intimate terms of endearment, never used before any of their friends.

"You're *not* all right—you've been putting in far too long hours at the office. Take last night. You ought to have come home, whatever the time! Besides"—she waited a fraction of a second—"it isn't even as if it would have disturbed me, now that we have two rooms."

He made no answer to that.

"Can't you leave more to Andrews?"

"I do leave much too much to him as it is."

David Andrews was Peter's head clerk—a funny, ginger-haired little man. Ella thought him a trifle slow, but she knew him to be utterly devoted to "the boss." Poor Andrews! He had an income many partners might have envied, but he also had an ill-tempered wife, and five children.

While they were having their coffee in the drawing-room Peter exclaimed: "How nice it is to be alone, Ella—I was a bit afraid there'd be someone to lunch."

And then something happened which really surprised Ella Sand very much indeed.

Her husband, leaning back in his easy chair, fell fast asleep!

She tiptoed from the room, and warned the parlour-maid not to come in for the coffee-cups. Then she wrote some letters and, at last, at a quarter to four, she opened the door of the drawing-room. As she did so, Peter sat up in his chair. "Hullo!" he said loudly, "is that Nurse?"

She walked swiftly across to him. "Peter!" she exclaimed, "have you been dreaming that you were ill? Why, we haven't had a nurse in this house—let me see—not since you had that horrible 'flu in 1923——"

"I suppose I was dreaming," he said, in a dazed voice. And then he stood up. "I say, oughtn't I to be getting ready?"

"Everything is ready; I saw to your bag myself, ages ago."

He came and put his arms right round her in what, unconsciously, she designated to herself as his old way.

"You *are* a good wife," he said, in a moved tone. "Good?—no, not good—perfect!" For a moment they clung to one another, and there was no touch of ritual about their long, tender, parting kiss. He whispered: "I'm not worthy of such a wife as you are, old girl."

And feeling just a little ashamed of the lump which rose to her throat, she whispered back: "What rot! Though I've never said so to you before, old man, I know very well that most husbands would hate their wives to lead the sort of life that I lead—always in the air, and never on land if I can help it!"

"Would you mind not going up till I'm back this time?"

"Of course I won't." But she felt very much surprised. He had never asked such a thing of her since she had learnt to fly.

Snatching up her pretty garden hat, she took his hand, and laughingly pulled him towards the door. "If you really want to start at four o'clock——"

In the hall he jammed on the shabby old panama hat to which he clung so obstinately, and she made a laughing grimace at it. And then both of them—it was strange, she told herself, with a touch of happy pride, how deep was their wordless unison—omitted the daily ritual embrace under the pergola.

Neither wanted to spoil the memory of that long, clinging kiss which had been so far more full of feeling than any recent caress—so they simply clasped hands.

A moment later Mrs. Sand, and Jackson the chauffeur, who was by way of being an old friend, watched the car speeding across the village green.

"The master don't look himself to-day," said the man; "for the matter of that he's looked worried these three weeks past."

As she turned back into the garden, she told herself that Jackson had lit upon the truth—Peter *did* look not so much tired as—worried. And then, all at once, there came over Ella Sand a sudden suspicion. It was more than a suspicion, it

was a conviction, that Peter was in financial trouble, that something had gone wrong with the great business of which he was so proud.

Hardly knowing what she was doing, she hurried round the house and made her way to a cedar-tree, under which she often sat. Her mind was in a whirl of excitement, of anxiety, of suspense. It hurt her to know that she and her husband wouldn't be together again for nearly a week. As for her flying—what was her flying compared to Peter, and her own intimate relation with Peter? It was nothing, nothing, nothing!

She was filled now with the conviction that something had gone wrong at the office. Peter had looked so unlike himself this last month or so, though it had needed the chauffeur's remark to make her realize it. But then she was such a busy woman, and a month ago she had been in all the whirl of the Amateur Aeroplane race, to say nothing of the intense excitement of her personal triumph.

But now she was thinking of Peter, only Peter. There had been many failures lately in the City. Perhaps her husband was involved in one of them.

By the time her smart-looking parlour-maid appeared with the tea-tray, Ella Sand had already planned out her own and Peter's future life on a tiny scale indeed, compared to the life they now led. Besides, she knew she could make a lot of money by teaching flying.

Again, while looking round the delicious garden and the delightful house, which required so much money to keep going, she told herself deliberately that nothing really mattered to her but Peter, and that she would be as happy with him in a cottage as in a palace. Theirs had been a wonderful marriage—never a cloud upon their radiant sky, never any of those painful, ignoble bickerings which often mar the joint life of a man and woman who yet love one another deeply. And they had been so fortunate, too, in the minor things that count for so much in human existence! They possessed health, wealth, and the warm goodwill, not only of friends, but of all those whom they employed.

And yet, oddly enough, the two of them had an enemy—a woman named Ann Bird, who was niece to the man who had founded the great firm of which Peter Sand was now sole owner. Almost as if she were there, standing before her,

there rose before Ella the thin figure, the eager, dark-looking, plain, clever face of the still young woman to whom she had tried to be especially cordial the first time they had met, although instinctively she had not liked her.

That had been ten years ago. And the day after that meeting Ella had received a letter, without beginning or end, accusing her of having stolen Peter from a woman to whom he belonged ! She had kept the poisonous thing by her for two or three days, and then she had made up her mind to show it to her husband.

She remembered, even after ten years, the incredulous amazement with which she had heard his quietly uttered words : "I'm more sorry than I can say for this, darling. I suppose you know who it's from ?" In answer to her astonished "I haven't the slightest idea !" he had uttered the name, "Ann Bird." "Not the girl we met out at dinner yesterday ?" And, Peter, nodding, had gone on to tell her, with what she could see was painful reluctance, that Miss Bird, almost from the moment he had entered into partnership with her uncle, had imagined that he loved her, and that, though she had never received the smallest reason for this belief, by word, look, or deed.

And over the years there had come, now and again, anonymous letters, filled with the spirit of venom and spite. Sometimes Ella showed the missive to Peter, more often she dismissed it from her mind contemptuously, while yet amazed that a woman's cruel malice could so endure. It was a long time now, three or four years, in fact, since Ann Bird's last envenomed arrow had reached her, and across the familiar piece of cream-laid writing-paper had run but one sentence : "Ask your husband why he likes the name of Gracie."

This time Ella had shown the letter to Peter, and he had laughed vexedly, explaining that there was a new clerk in his office named Grace Manley, in whom he took a rather special interest, because he had known her dead father. Miss Manley was a good, quiet little mouse of a girl—now the only bread-winner in a home which consisted of one crippled brother.

With the increased prosperity of the firm, Miss Bird's income automatically increased, and not long ago Peter had said, with a laugh : "I wonder what she'll do with her money ? She ought to leave it to the Cats' Home."

At half-past six the maid came out again, with a salver heaped up with letters.

Ella Sand had a large and varied correspondence, and it took her quite a long time to read and sort them all. But at last she came to the last envelope, and then she knew why she had been so curiously haunted this afternoon by the image of despicable Ann Bird.

She tore the envelope open, to see, written across the plain sheet of thick paper she drew out of it :

“If you want to know why your husband so frequently motors up the Great North Road, your curiosity will be satisfied if you pay a call on Mrs. Beach, ‘Homeland,’ Lyndhurst Road, Trantford.”

Perhaps because she had been so emotionally stirred to-day, Ella Sand felt herself suddenly enveloped as with a flame of intense wrath. She was so angry, so disgusted, so indignant, that she leapt right up from her easy chair, realizing for the first time in her life how people feel who see red, and wish to kill. Then she began to laugh nervously at herself ; it was silly to feel like this. After all, Ann Bird was a lunatic—mad on this one point of Peter. There were asylums for such women.

No doubt a Mrs. Beach *did* live at “Homeland,” Lyndhurst Road, Trantford, the widow, maybe, of some valued member of Peter’s staff who had fallen in the War. If so, Peter probably *did* go and see her now and again. He had been nobly generous to the widows and dependents of those whose names were inscribed on his Roll of Honour.

She sat down and tore the sheet of tough linen paper across and across and across. Then, not satisfied with that, she took up the pretty matchbox with which she had lit the one cigarette she allowed herself after tea, and set fire to the pieces.

Feeling the better for having done this, she walked quietly to the house, and asked the parlour-maid to turn the telephone up to her bedroom. Ann Bird’s vile letter had distracted her mind from that uncomfortable suspicion that all was not well, financially, with Peter. But even so, it would be nice to speak to good, faithful Andrews—Andrews, who always secretly amused her by calling Peter “the boss.”

At last she heard the familiar voice : “Yes, Mr. Andrews speaking, Who is it ?” When she answered, laughing :

"Guess who it is!" the voice became eager, deferential. "Why, Mrs. Sand? Please forgive me! I'm only just back from the City."

Somehow, the very tone of his voice would have reassured her, had she still wanted reassurance. All the same, she exclaimed: "I want to ask you a question, Mr. Andrews. Is everything all right at the office? My husband hasn't looked well lately. We've all noticed it down here——"

"I can't say that I've noticed it, Mrs. Sand. But we've been extra busy, as I expect you know."

"But everything *is* all right, I suppose?"

"All right? How do you mean?"

"With the business, of course!"

She heard him chuckle. "There isn't a business east of Temple Bar doing as well as we are! It's simply marvellous——"

"But my husband does look very tired, Mr. Andrews. Don't you think he ought to have a holiday? We might run over to the Continent for a fortnight."

"Could you spare the time, Mrs. Sand? Isn't there to be something big on in the flying line at Eastbourne soon?"

"I'd scrap anything if he needs a holiday," she called back, and then felt just a little nettled at the touch of surprise in the voice with which Peter's devoted henchman answered: "That's very good of you—but the boss wouldn't expect that, Mrs. Sand."

She was just going to hang up the receiver when she remembered something else she wanted to ask Mr. Andrews.

"Was there a man of the name of Beach on our staff killed in the War?" she called out in her clear voice.

Dead silence.

Had they been cut off? She rattled the receiver impatiently. "Mr. Andrews! Mr. Andrews! Are you there?" And as if from a long way off she at last heard his voice: "Is that still you, Mrs. Sand?"

"We were cut off! Did you hear me ask you about some people called *Beach*? I have an idea the man may have been killed in the War."

"Not that I know of, Mrs. Sand."

She felt really quite annoyed. No doubt David Andrews was a good fellow, but he was very stupid; she had always thought *that*.



"Then you don't remember the name?" she said sharply.

"You're a bit too quick for me, Mrs. Sand. I do remember that we had a man called Beach some time ago, but he left us. He wasn't killed in the War——"

"My husband was kind to him, wasn't he?"

"Why, yes, he was, of course. The boss is kind to everyone, Mrs. Sand."

"I thought so!"

There was a touch of triumph in her voice, and she rang off, having learnt all she really wanted to know.

The next day, Sunday, some people telephoned to ask if they might come to lunch, and Ella felt as if she might just as well have them as not.

But, constantly, even while she was listening to their talk, and answering their somewhat fatuous questions about her wonderful flying, Ella Sand found herself thinking of spiteful Ann Bird, and of her hateful insinuation against Peter.

And then, after the visitors had gone, like an inspiration from Heaven came the determination to go to-morrow, Monday, to Trantford, there to see Mrs. Beach (if Mrs. Beach really lived there), and persuade her to come and face Miss Bird.

Eagerly Ella went off into her husband's study. Though most comfortably furnished, it had an unlived-in look. But it was beautifully tidy, every book and paper in its place, and very soon she found the road map she was looking for. Peter hadn't taken it with him, as he knew every inch of the way.

She spread it out over the writing-table. Yes, here was Trantford—right on the Great North Road. And, lastly, she found Lyndhurst Road on the outskirts of what was evidently an old country town.

## II

As Ella Sand stepped out of Trantford Station the next morning she asked herself why she had acted on what had been, after all, a sudden impulse. She felt a little nervous and unlike herself. For one thing she was not used to going about alone. Her journeys to aeroplane tournaments at home and abroad were almost of the nature of Royal progresses.

Two or three men glanced at her with obvious interest and

admiration. Not only was she a very pretty woman, but she set off her beauty with all the care and perfection which only money ensures. No wonder her appearance even created a little stir in this sleepy station yard.

She went up to an ancient fly. "I want you to drive me to Lyndhurst Road. I'm not sure of the number," she said, pleasantly, to the cabman. After about twenty minutes' drive the man turned round. "It's here, ma'am." And, after having paid him, she began walking slowly down the side-path of the countrified-looking road.

For the most part the houses were commonplace, new-looking little villas ; but all at once she came to a better-class house.

It stood some way back, in a biggish garden, and it was the only house in the road, so far as she could see, that had a garage. Across the strong oak gate was printed the name, "Homeland." Here, then, lived Mrs. Beach? So far, so good.

She stopped, and, leaning on the gate, gazed at the house with curiosity. And then she realized, with a feeling of mingled regret and relief, that it was empty. The blinds were all drawn down, and the garden, though brilliant with colour, had a somewhat neglected look.

She was just about to turn away when, to her surprise, she saw the front door of "Homeland" open. A thin, tall man, dressed all in black, and wearing a seedy-looking top-hat, came out of it, and walked down the path towards the gate. What an odd-looking creature ! It was difficult to imagine him a member of her husband's staff.

She moved away from the gate, and he, opening it, would have passed her, but that she stepped forward with the words : "I'm speaking to Mr. Beach, am I not ?"

A look of astonishment flashed into his thin, pale face. "I'm not Mr. Beach, ma'am. Mr. Beach has not yet arrived."

And then they both turned round, for quick footsteps pattered down the brick path leading from the house, and a neat-looking young servant came up to the man who was not Mr. Beach.

"The gentleman from London thinks you'd better wait," she exclaimed, "till the master's come ; then they'll telephone to you—but do nothing till then, he says."

"Very good," answered the mournful-looking man, and lifting his hat, he walked quickly towards the town.

Mrs. Sand turned to the maid. "I wonder," she said, hesitatingly, "if I might see Mrs. Beach?"

She pushed open the gate, and began walking towards the shuttered house.

"I think you can do so, ma'am." The girl added, impulsively: "She looks beautiful—so happy and peaceful now."

There came over the visitor a sudden feeling of misgiving. "I don't quite understand," she said, hesitatingly.

And then it was the turn of the young woman to feel, as she would have expressed it to herself, taken aback.

"Perhaps you don't know, ma'am, that the poor mistress died yesterday morning? Folk would have no trouble in getting servants, if all ladies were like 'er. She and the master were so happy, too—oh, it *is* sad!"

"I'm very, very grieved to hear this," she said quietly. "I did not even know that Mrs. Beach was ill."

"She never picked up at all," said the girl in a low tone, "after the baby died. But nurse says that her death had nothing to do with that, ma'am. She just put her foot out of bed, and then—she was gone! Little Master Pete was in the room at the time, playing near the window, poor little chap. Not that he noticed anything, for we got him out of the way pretty quick, and he's only just three years old, as I expect you know."

"Pete?" Ella felt touched. She knew that her husband was godfather to many of the children connected with his firm; and as a matter of fact, she had stood godmother to quite a number of them herself.

"Does Mr. Sand ever come here?" she asked; for she realized that Peter must often go near this town on his way up north.

The girl shook her head. "Not that I know of; I've only been here three months, and they haven't had many people come. Besides, Mrs. Beach wasn't over well." There was a pause. "Will you come in and see the poor mistress?" asked the girl.

"No, I don't think I'll do that."

She shrank instinctively from this house of sorrow, but the door into the cool-looking hall was open, and suddenly she stepped across the threshold of the hushed dwelling.

"Perhaps I will sit down for just a few moments in the hall," she said, in a low voice.

Not only was it a very hot day, but she knew that there was no train back to town for something like an hour and a half from now. Also, she had had a shock.

"I think it's cooler in master's study," said the little maid.

Ella walked through the hall into a rather untidy room, though she was surprised at the look of comfort, even of opulence, there. There were deep easy chairs, and a fine old glazed bookcase.

No one had taken the trouble to draw down the blinds in this, the back of the house, and the one wide bow-window looked out on to an orchard, where a little boy, evidently "Pete," was playing cup-and-ball.

"One misfortune always brings another, so they say," observed the girl. "Master Pete's nurse's mother had an accident four days ago, so there's no one to look special after him. He's a good little boy, and if he's lost his poor mammy, he's got a splendid daddy left. Mr. Beach fair dotes on the child."

"Where *is* Mr. Beach?" asked Ella. Somehow she felt she would like to see him, if only for a moment, just to express her sympathy.

"The master's a commercial traveller, ma'am, so he's often away. But he'd only been gone an hour yesterday when what I told you happened. Neither cook nor me knew how to get at him. So we telephoned to Mr. Andrews——"

"Mr. Andrews?" Ella felt rather startled. "You don't mean a Mr. Andrews who lives at Clapham?"

"Yes, that's the gentleman," said the maid eagerly. "He's been here since nine o'clock this morning, and before he came he'd already found out where the master was likely to be, and had telegraphed to him."

What an extraordinary coincidence! That she, Ella Sand, should have talked of these poor people on Friday to Mr. Andrews—people whose name he had only remembered with something of an effort—and then that, suddenly, he, too, should be brought into this intimate contact with them! But he was a kind little man; not as kind as her dear, large-hearted Peter; but still the sort of man to whom people turn in trouble.

"I know Mr. Andrews. Can I see him?" she asked.

"He's slipped round to the doctor; but it's close by; and if you'll just wait in here, ma'am, I'll ask him to see you the minute he's back. What name shall I say?"

"Tell him Mrs. Sand would like to speak to him."

The young woman shut the study door softly, and Ella Sand sat down in one of the comfortable easy chairs.

She was not an imaginative woman, but this unwitting intrusion into a house of mourning moved and impressed her deeply. Though she had never admitted it to anybody, she had an almost animal shrinking from death. That, perhaps, because she had steeled herself to face it so constantly, and because, as was inevitable, she had often witnessed "a crash."

She got up and began walking about the study. It was an ill-kept room; perhaps Mr. Beach was one of those foolish men who hate to have their papers moved or even dusted. Even Peter had begun by being like that. . . .

And then, all at once, lying where it had evidently been flung down in haste, she saw something which seemed to cause a frightful, involuntary commotion in all her physical being. She pressed her hands over her eyes as if to shut out a horrible sight, and then she forced herself to look again.

Yes, the shabby old panama hat, lying on the chair, was certainly Peter's—*her husband's*. There was the familiar, unsightly grey stain on the brim she had herself tried to steam out of it.

She moved like an automaton across to the bookcase, and stared through the glass doors. Of course they were there—she had known they would be—the dirty old books, most of them dating from his childhood and boyhood, which she had forced Peter, three years ago, to turn out of his study at home.

At home? The unspoken word hit her like a blow. This queer, untidy, dusty house, now full of sorrow and of loss, was Peter's real home—not the beautiful, tidy dwelling-place she and he occasionally shared together.

The door opened, and as she turned quickly round she saw that it was Mr. Andrews, his eyes filled with a great fear, as well as shocked surprise, at the sight of her.

"Mrs. Sand," he said feebly, "this is no place for you. Mr. Sand would be very much distressed to find you here."

"Yet he will find me here," she answered, quietly, facing him.

He gazed at her irresolutely, and she could see that he was

asking himself how much she knew, and what "the boss" would want her to be told.

"I rely on you to tell me the truth," she said firmly. "Firstly, how long has this gone on? Of course, I realize that my husband was really here, when he pretended—to me—that he was away on business."

There was a terrible edge of disgust and contempt in the level voice.

"You're being very unfair," he said, quickly. "Mr. Sand was often away on business. He mostly came here when you were away."

"I was often away."

"Well, you were, Mrs. Sand, weren't you?"

They looked at one another in silence for a moment, and then the unfortunate little man pulled himself together. If never brave before, he would be brave to-day—for the sake of the boss he loved.

"In a way there's no excuse to be made for Mr. Sand—and he knows that well enough. He's said it to me scores of times. But there! Human nature's a queer thing——"

He hoped she would say something in answer to that. But she only looked at him with a set face, and so he went on, gathering courage as he went.

"If you'll excuse my saying so, Mrs. Sand, your husband hadn't a home. I don't say my home's a comfortable place, but it is a home. Many a time—I won't say hundreds of times, but dozens of times, for I've been with Mr. Sand since the year after he married—I've known the boss go back to a lonely house. Mind you, I don't say that he wasn't proud of your flying, because he was, and is. And I don't say that he wouldn't have gone on being, well—faithful"—he stumbled a little at the word—"to you, if it hadn't been that he was sorely tempted."

"I don't understand what you mean, Mr. Andrews."

Once more there was a touch of bitter contempt in her toneless voice.

"I mean that he was sorely tempted when he found that there was a young woman who, for her own misfortune, let me tell you, loved him truly, and was always eager to see him, to welcome him. I suppose you can guess who that was, Mrs. Sand?"

She gazed at him, too astonished to speak, and for a moment

there came over her a wild hope that this awful incredible experience was a dream—a frightfully vivid dream.

But no—for Mr. Andrews went on: "Grace Manley, of course! Mr. Sand told me ever so long ago that you'd spoken about her to him."

"D'you mean," she asked, "that it had already begun *then*?"

"Goodness, no! Don't be harder on Mr. Sand than you have need to be, Mrs Sand. It wasn't for a long, long time after then that the trouble began. After Miss Manley had left the office, she and that poor crippled brother of hers had some legal worry, and the boss used to go and see them about it, when he'd an empty evening, when you were away flying. Then the girl's brother died; the boss comforted her, and then—well, it just happened!"

"I see," she muttered. "I see."

And at last she did see.

"Now that the poor soul's dead, it's best you should know the truth," he said slowly. "Grace Manley just worshipped Mr. Sand."

"And he, I suppose, worshipped her?" she interjected harshly.

"No, Mrs. Sand, that was not so. He's never worshipped anyone but you. Of course, he was fond of Gracie—how could he help it? But what he was after—almost without knowing it—was a home. And then, when the child came, well, that naturally brought him much nearer to her."

She looked at him dumbly. She hadn't thought of the child as Peter's child.

"The day the little chap was born," went on David Andrews, nervously clasping and unclasping his red hands, "the boss told me that you and he had agreed not to have children. That was a mistake, Mrs. Sand, and a bad mistake, if you'll excuse my saying so. D'you think I'd have stayed with Mrs. Andrews"—his voice sank—"if we hadn't had children?" Then, scornfully, he answered his own question: "Not I!"

"And what am *I* to do?" she asked desperately.

She had often heard Peter say: "I don't say old Andrews is a clever man, but he's thoroughly dependable, and there's no one's opinion I'd rather have about anything that really matters."

"There's one thing you could do," he said, doubtfully ; "you could go right away now, and pretend not to know anything about it, Mrs. Sand. If you're the woman I take you to be, you'd be able to carry that through."

"I suppose I could," she said slowly.

Then, with sudden passion, she took her words back. "No, I couldn't, Mr. Andrews ! I'm not like Peter—I couldn't be always playing a part," and once more there came a note of contempt as well as bitterness in her voice.

"Don't you run away with the idea that he was happy," said the little man, sadly. "Some men I've known fair glory in that sort of thing. But the boss isn't like that. He was often very miserable, right-down ashamed ; indeed he was."

"What would you do in my place ?" she asked urgently.

"I'd rather tell you what I wouldn't do. If I were you, Mrs. Sand, I wouldn't part him from his child."

And as he said the words "his child," there came the sound of a motor stopping at the gate ; hurried footsteps up the path ; and Peter's voice, hoarse with bewildered pain, calling out in the hall : "Andrews ! Andrews ! Where are you ?"

But before an answer could have reached him, the door of the study was flung open, and, as "the boss" came in, David Andrews slipped past him into the hall.

"Ella ! You here ?"

There came a terrible look over Peter Sand's haggard face. He thought the man he trusted had betrayed him, and at once Ella's intimate knowledge of Peter told her what was in his mind.

"I came here this morning," she said quickly, "because of an anonymous letter which reached me on Saturday from Miss Bird."

He muttered : "Thank God it wasn't Andrews !"

She felt horribly hurt. Then it was of Andrews, his humble, faithful friend, that he thought, not of her, his wife ?

But there she was mistaken.

"Ella !" he said again, "Ella !"

"Yes, Peter."

Each tried not to see the other's woe-laden face. Then he said slowly : "I suppose you know everything ?"

Before she could answer there came a rain of knocks low down on the door. •



Peter turned and opened it, and the child Peter's wife now knew to be Peter's son tumbled through, a wooden brick in his hand.

"Daddy!" he cried shrilly, "I wants to go out in the car——"

The little boy was scared into sudden silence by the stern voice, which said: "Hush, Pete."

Turning his back on his wife and on the child, Peter Sand walked over to the window and stared out.

Ella hesitated the fraction of a second, and then she went close up to the little boy, and stooped down.

"Pete," she whispered, "would you like to go a long drive in the car with me and your daddy, till we get to a lovely garden with a pond in it?"

"Is there any fishes in the pond?" he asked suspiciously.

"Not now. But we'll put some in——"

The child hung his head. Then he whispered: "What's daddy looking at?" And, coaxingly: "Lift me up, lady," and he held up his arms.

She lifted him up, and as she held him somewhat clumsily to her, she felt for the first time that he was like Peter. It was something about the turn of his strong, straight little body that reminded her, in an intimate sense, of the man she loved.

Soon the child began struggling violently. "I wants to stand on the window-sill," he said fretfully.

She put him down carefully on the broad sill; and then, still holding him with her left hand, she put her right arm, with what had always been an habitual, familiar gesture, through that of her husband.

"Peter," she said, speaking for the first time that day in a tremulous voice, "this little boy wants us to take him to our house. He's longing to see our pond."

Peter Sand did not turn round. He went on staring straight before him into the orchard. Then he said in a hard tone: "You're very kind, Ella, but we can't do that, because of——"

"What?" she asked.

"Because of our neighbours."

"Because of our neighbours? What nonsense!"

She added, and somehow the sound of her own now firm, confident voice seemed to put her right with herself: "Leave

the neighbours to me ! ' If necessary, we'll move right away. But I don't think it will be necessary. Your little boy is going to be my little boy—if you'll let him be, old man."

And then at last he did turn round. " Old girl," he said, in a strangled tone—" old girl ! "

She went to the door, opened it, and called out : " Mr. Andrews ! "

" Yes, Mrs. Sand ? "

" I'm taking them both away "—she pointed to the man and the child. " While I'm getting a few things for Pete put together, perhaps you and my husband might have a little talk."

Then : " Pete," said Ella in the voice which most people who heard it obeyed, " come along now—come with mother."

" Muvver ! " repeated the little boy doubtfully ; " you not my muvver. Mummy's my muvver."

" Mother is my name, too," she said firmly, " and you've got to call me ' mother,' my dear."

Holding his hand, she walked across the shadowed hall, and, going outside the front door, rang the bell. The maid with whom she was already acquainted answered it.

" I've persuaded Mr. Beach to come over to my house for the next few days," she said quietly, " and we are taking his little boy, too. Would you put just a few of the child's clothes together ? Mr. Andrews will settle everything."

The girl exclaimed : " I'm glad poor master's going away. Cook thinks he'd best try and remember the missus as she looked when she smiled, good-bye at him. But as you're such a friend, ma'am, I expect that, after all, you'd just like to see Mrs. Beach ? "

Ella hesitated a moment.

Then : " Yes," she said, " I should like to see Peter's mother," and then, letting go of the child's hot little hand, she followed the maid up the darkened staircase.



## ANDREW SOUTAR

### *Green Oak-leaves*

Andrew Soutar the novelist has travelled extensively in the Near and Far East, Spain, Portugal and America. He served in the Air Force during the War and in North Russia in 1919. He has written six volumes of short stories, many film plays and over a dozen novels, the latest of which is *Be Good, Sweet Maid*.



## GREEN OAK-LEAVES

ONCE when she was desirous of mounting again to the saddle after leading her cob through the wood, he came out of the denser growth where, as steward to her husband, he had been marking the oaks for the felling, and he stooped and placed his hand so that it formed a step for her small riding-boot ; and he reached up with the graceful effort of one who had owned horses and loved them and straightened the bridle ; and seeing her gaze upon him he modestly lowered his own as though it were sacrilege in him to look upon her in the quiet of that sequestered place.

“ Thank you, Manton.”

“ My Lady ! ” he said in acknowledgment, and stepped back so that she might proceed on her way.

Fifty yards ahead the path through the wood turned abruptly to the right so that she had no greater need than to turn her eyes to mark him still standing by the side of the track where she had interrupted him in his work. A mellowed shaft of sunlight struck through the tracery of oak-leaves immediately behind him and seemed to set alight the round head with its fair, curling hair and Viking poise ; the shoulders sloped gently from the base of the neck as your true athlete’s should ; the bare arms (for timber marking and limbing is warm work and hard) showed peculiarly white as they hung by his side. He remained stone-still, like a sentinel at the listening-post, until she and the cob passed around the bend in the road.

My lady sighed.

And one June afternoon, when the heat had made inroads on her strength, she fainted while resting with her maid on the Down slopes that sheltered the house from the winds blowing northwards. In her frenzy the maid halloed for help, and it was Manton the steward who came over the ridge where he had been checking the flocks with the shepherd. He came down with long swinging strides, he dipped his

handkerchief in the dew-pond and bathed my lady's forehead and her lips ; then he stooped and lifted her in his arms and carried her homeward, the maid trotting by his side, tears of envy and admiration fighting for pride of place in her eyes.

He held the slim, young body with the tenderness of a parent his best beloved ; her long hair had fallen from its modest folds and the dark strands streamed in the breeze like a pennant ; her eyes were closed ; she lay in the crook of his arm with the blissful content of a tired babe who has found sanctuary where nature would have it seek.

Sir Cuthbert Carey, watching from the study window, saw them enter the drive, the maid rumpling the lace of her dress and babbling hysterically, Manton, tall and erect and seeming to joy in the task that had been given him.

Sir Cuthbert came down the steps from the hall door to meet them. Great love does not betray great fear in moments such as these. He spoke gently to the maid, now weeping openly by Manton's side.

"Her Ladyship has only fainted," he said. "Manton will carry her to her room : see that it is in order."

The maid passed through the hall and went up the stairs. Sir Cuthbert stretched out a hand and smoothed the hair of the limp figure lying in Manton's arms. "Dear one," he said in a whisper, and there was great pain in his eyes as he looked up and gazed at the stalwart Manton. "She should not have walked so far," he said. "Will you carry her Ladyship upstairs, Manton?"

And Manton went first, and the old baronet followed in his wake ; he sighed as he followed, but it was not out of fear that he might lose the flower that had been given into his keeping. It was the sigh of envy—envy of Manton's youth and strength that could render succour—envy of the rightfulness of Nature's dictates.

Tenderly Manton placed the flower on the white bed and stepped back. Sir Cuthbert approached the side and looked across at his young steward : again the note of envy was dominant as he sighed, "Thank you, Manton. It was most providential that you were near at hand. You may go . . . I'd like to have your report on those ewes, to-night."

"Very good, Sir Cuthbert."

And yet he made no attempt to leave the room ; a change

came over his countenance ; the blue eyes appeared to lose their mobility ; the forehead was wrinkled as in perplexity ; the power of concentration was gone.

Sir Cuthbert was older by thirty years and more—his grey hair and seamed neck betrayed that—but of the two, as they looked at each other across the bed, he was the stronger, the more favoured. Manton might be young in years, but somewhere in France he had parted with that which was more valuable than youth. It would come so swiftly, so strangely—that visitant of his mind : the ghost of silence that closed the doors of his mind and communed within for half an hour and longer, shutting out all else and leaving him at the end of the period without knowledge of what had passed during the communion. Just one of the baffling phases of what is designated shell-shock.

Sir Cuthbert said to the maid :

“ Take Manton downstairs and let him rest in the study for a while ; I will be with him shortly.” He turned to the Steward himself : “ Not feeling yourself—are you ? ” he said. “ It is the heat, I expect. Go downstairs like a good fellow.”

Manton went slowly out of the room ; the maid was waiting on the landing to show him the way down. Sir Cuthbert seated himself on the edge of the bed, taking a white hand in his and clasping it.

“ Marion ? ”

She opened her eyes ; her lips parted. She smiled. “ Dear man,” she said, and sighed. “ I startled you ? ”

“ I love you,” he said with simplicity that found its pathos in the disparity between their ages.

“ I was thinking of you when the faintness came,” she said softly, “ wishing you were near and fearing—fearing that you might be distressed unduly.”

“ I am always distressed if you are out of my sight,” he told her. “ I was in the study and did not hear you go out after lunch.”

“ And I thought you were asleep,” she said, her face shadowing the instant the words were out. For youth had no need of sleep in the light of day. Youth was out on the hills in the sunlight, lopping limbs from the oak or elm, or checking sheep or rounding up straying cattle. “ Manton brought you down from near the dew-pond,” he told her,



adding quietly and without admiration: "Splendid fellow, Manton! Fate has been very unkind to him, Marion, dear."

"Unkind? He is so strong!"

The love of the primitive cannot be eradicated from woman.

"I'm afraid the exertion taxed him, Marion. I sent him down to the study to rest."

"His mind?" She tried to raise herself to a sitting posture, but he gently urged her back to the pillow.

"I must take him to town again," he said, "I'm certain that Maxwell can do something for him, it is only a passing phase." Maxwell was the only specialist Sir Cuthbert hadn't consulted on behalf of his steward.

Marion looked at him very tenderly:

"How kind you are to everybody," she said. "Why?"

"Perhaps—perhaps yearning makes one kind," he said. "If my boy had suffered out there I should hope that kindness would be extended to him."

His boy! Sir Cuthbert had no son. Sometimes she fancied that he *believed* he had one, for when he was alone in the study, and the windows were open so that his voice carried gently to her boudoir immediately overhead, she had heard him talking to the mythical boy—the boy that might some day come into the title and carry on the honoured name of Carey when he, Sir Cuthbert, now the last of his line, should have been laid away with the ashes of his forebears. He would speak to his boy with the deep tenderness and solicitude that comes of irrepressible yearning. He would say: "Yes, my boy, you shall travel, even as I and your grandfather travelled, all over the world. And you shall find, as I have often told you, that a Carey left his mark in every corner of this wonderful Empire. Yes, yes, it is right that you should travel; it is expected of you."

Or, perhaps, he would be talking to him of the war that had devastated Europe; he would be sending the boy out with the rest of the British youth, and although the voice might break slightly with emotion because of the fear of losing him, it would not be without a thrill of pride that comes of giving a first-born to the service of the State.

"You will be brave, my boy," he would say. "I have no doubt of your courage because you are a Carey. And I shall

be thinking of you every minute of the day and from my dreams you will not be absent. Remember this : I would rather have brought me word that my boy had died a hero than was living with the coward's mark on his brow."

Or he would be taking him over the estate, and he would be saying to him : " Always the Careys have held the respect of their servants, for never have they been ungenerous or unjust. So would I have you. The Careys go back into the days of William of Normandy if you care to trace the chart, and they stand in history as firmly as these oaks stand on the old estate. Be an oak—a British oak."

As he leaned over the bedside, she reached up a white hand and caressed his cheek.

" . . . Love me," she said, with infinite tenderness, and fell again to dreaming.

The disparity between their ages had meant nothing to anyone save their cynical friends. She knew, as he did, that even in those circles where delicacy of thought is supposed to have its source, their marriage had been the subject of vulgar jest. May and December ! The woman, they said in their ribald conversation, had sold herself for material gain, and he had paid his gold for that which he couldn't possibly appreciate.

Again she opened her eyes to find him gazing down on her.

" We have been happy," she said. " Say that ? "

" Very happy," he agreed, and raised her hand to his lips. " Could anyone else have given you greater happiness, Marion ? "

" None," she said.

He turned to look at the window. Reluctantly he said :

" When I saw Manton carrying you down from the hill—he so young and strong—I asked myself if I had not been selfish in robbing you of your youth and all the romances to which youth is entitled."

The fingers of the little white hand closed tightly on his as she said :

" You have been good to Manton ! "

" I knew his father," said Sir Cuthbert, adding, rather emotionally : " One of the stoutest hearted men that ever served a sovereign." Then, as if to chide her for forgetfulness : " The Mantons go back almost as far as the Careys."

Another pause ; he seemed to be wondering if she thought him untrue to his friendship with the Mantons in employing their son as steward. "It would have been no kindness on my part to send the young fellow to a colony or supply him with money that may only have added to his handicap."

"You always do the right thing," she interposed.

"Manton," he said, "was made for the open air ; he finds no restrictions here ; the estate might be his own. . . . You are feeling better, dear one ?"

"Much better, Cuthbert," she told him, "but I'd like to lie here and rest till dinner."

"As you will," he said.

He was about to move away when a gesture of hers stayed him. "You asked me," she said, and the palid cheeks were slightly suffused with the pink of modesty, "if anyone could have given me greater happiness than you have given. Tell me—has there ever been anyone in your life—any woman—whom you could have loved more deeply ?"

"No !" he answered, but the sigh was just behind the word.

She understood. Pride of birth was greater in him than desire for love or life. Vanity is the first of the human weaknesses. Already the dust of extinction was beginning to accumulate in the Carey archives. No child, no son, no heir. They loved each other with a devotedness that lifted them high above the cynicism of their friends and acquaintances, yet each knew that in the heart of the other there was ineffable pain.

"You are going downstairs ?"

"To the study," he said. "I will not go if you wish me to remain."

"I wish you to go," she said and smiled. "You are at work on the book ?"

"It is a joy to me, Marion," pleadingly.

"I know it is," she said, "and I love to think you are happy in the writing of it."

"You see," and he flushed like a girl who has awakened to the first call of the heart, "there is no sound, authentic history of the Careys in existence."

"It shall come from you," she said, almost gaily. "And in an hour's time, when I have rested, come quietly back to me so that I may tell you something . . ."

"Dear one?"

"Something that may creep into that history," she said.  
"Go, without another word."

He glanced out of the window as he went.

"Wonderful fellow, Manton," he said as he glanced;  
"there he goes again, swinging up the hill. Dead one moment; the symbol of life the next."

Her fingers plucked at the lace of the white pillow. She didn't speak.

. . . . .

High up on the Down slopes, the dew-pond lay just under the black undulating line that marked the ridge. The south-west winds might bluster up the valley from the Channel, but the face of the dew-pond was never ruffled. To right and left of the pond were grassy cradles, wherein the Romans, when they held the hills, might have composed the limbs of their dead. The grass-covered plateaux, forming a front to the weald, were the ramparts fashioned an æon and more ago by the fallen army of invaders; the gorse-covered slopes to the higher ground were never scaled by the ancients, who hurled their hordes against them. Historical battle grounds these Downs, every hollow pregnant with significance, every mound a memory, every murmur of the wind the whisper of a ghost. Grey and sombre in the light of day, grey and sepulchral in the light of the moon, when the shadows shift slowly, as though warrior turned over in his sleep and whispered to warrior. Silent, too, save for the intermittent bark of a sheep dog tethered behind the shepherd's hut at the base of the hills, or eerie rustle of the long rank grass, when a startled hare leaps from its "form" to seek the sanctuary of the gorse.

Night after night Manton made his way to the summit of the Downs, to gaze beyond where the Channel skirted the land, seeming to call to the restless that it might take them out to the Atlantic, waiting sinisterly, farther to the West.

Manton, with his Viking head and giant's throw of the shoulders; Manton, so gentle and cultured of voice that a sob stirred in the throat of the meanest labourer on the estate when he was addressed; for there was envy in the voice, just as there was envy in the sigh of Sir Cuthbert; envy of the placid mind and contented heart and freedom

from the ever-recurring visions that encroached on the rationalism of the mind and isolated it temporarily from the world of reality.

And always it was on the edge of the dew-pond that Manton stood, when he felt the brain beginning to tire or sway in its reasoning. There was incalculable sympathy in the face of the dew-pond; all the dearest friends he had known in those tempestuous four years in France, gathered at the edge and looked over his shoulder, or peered up through the shallow depth to hold converse with him. There was little Bell-Collins who had fagged for him in 'thirteen and was his adjutant in 'fifteen; Manton called him "Cholic," because the little face crinkled like a last year's apple when he grinned (it was like that when Manton searched the sodden uniform for "effects" to be sent home to the grief-stricken parents). There was dear old Roddy, the dreamer, who was always willing to transfer his seven days' leave to a brother officer, because the only person he wished to see in England couldn't make up her mind that he was the one she wished to welcome (and when the decision was made in his favour, and he left the dug-out with high hope in his heart, the enemy sniper said, in effect, "No, Roddy; after all, you might be disappointed, for women are the very devil.")

And there was "Sentimental Septimus," son of a Lambeth tailor and a gentleman to boot. Always the first over the top, but a holy terror for reading his love letters aloud. (Just before he died, he begged Manton to bury the letters with him in case somebody "got hold of his secret"—the secret being the fact that the letters were written by himself and posted back to him by anybody's Orderly when on leave.)

And sometimes the face of the dew-pond would become distorted by hideous bloody masks that leered at him; then came the thundering of howitzers, followed by the jazz-drum-tapping of the Lewis guns, and the more musical ping of the rifle fire. And the heavy stuff would come over the Down ridge out of nowhere and whine and whistle, and little "Cholic" would call: "That's yours, Manton! Your number's on it!" He knew it wasn't, but "Cholic" loved to see him duck. He knew that nothing could harm him for *she* was somewhere near. His dream woman!

Ever since he was a boy at his first preparatory school this

dream woman had flitted, phantom-like, through Manton's life, but he had not seen her face distinctly until he came to the dew-pond on the Down slopes. Always he had thoughts of her as a dryad of the woods who must ever elude his outstretched arms, yet never ceased to beckon and call him. Even when the face of the dew-pond mirrored the bloodiest carnage, he knew instinctively that she was there—just there—behind the most hideous scene of all. He wanted to speak to her, to hold her in his arms, to say to her: "Dear lady, I love you," even though it should sound like a school-boy's first confession of love. But speech was denied him; it was as though he had forgotten the faculty of articulation. Therefore he spoke only with his eyes, never doubting their eloquence.

Sometimes, when he smiled at her face in the water, he fancied he could "place her." Surely it was Yvonne, whose mother kept the estaminet on the road that skirted Ypres on the north? Yvonne, who sat on the edge of the deal table and fastened the gilt charm around his neck? And called him her "bébé" who had not yet learnt to kiss? No! It couldn't be Yvonne, for she married a Belgian lieutenant, and became fat and gross before the war was ended.

And sometimes, during this hour of mysticism, he fancied he had seen her in another world—a world of downland and peace and quiet.

Once, one night when the moon was at full and the night sky was sprinkled with diamond dust, she came, not out of the water of the dew-pond, but out of the purple dusk and the fitful shadows of the slopes. Her gown was of olive green, so that it scarcely showed against the carpet of the slopes; her hair was dark, and her eyes so lustrous that the moon might have painted miniatures of itself in the pupils; her figure was slim and pliant as the willows in the weald; the girth of the exquisite bosom was not less glorious than the sweep of the eyebrows, which reminded him of the wings of a gull in flight.

She came slowly towards him like a wraith passing over a field of whispering corn, and though he tried to get to his feet the effort was beyond him, so completely had her presence absorbed his strength. He held out his arms, appealingly, and though his eyes spoke to her, his tongue was dumb.

She bent her lithe figure and rested her small white hands

in his ; and he said to her with his eyes : " Dear lady, all my life I have loved you and yearned for you."

He drew her, unresisting, to the grass by his side, and with a little sigh of joy or resignation she suffered him to clasp his left arm around her shoulders and draw her closer to his heart. The warmth of her stirred to quivering life the semi-moribund ; he turned so that her head lay in the cradle of his crooked arm and the miniature moons in her eyes looked up and smiled submissively at the greater light in the heavens. The purple of the slopes was deeper now ; in the valley below the fragrant shadows had blended in a sombre, sympathetic whole. The south wind sweeping over the long grass and the musk-laden gorse, brushing the delicate cheek of wild anemone and orchis, kissed with even lighter touch the faces of the lovers. The romance of the Downs was complete.

An hour, and the arrested mind regained its freedom, the light of rationalism sped back to the vacant eyes. As a child awakens from a blissful dream and reaches instinctively for the treasure that isn't there, so Manton grasped at the vision that had eluded him. The face of the dew-pond was smooth and opaque ; from the valley below came the monotonous bleat of sheep in the fold. There was no movement in the air or on the Downs. No movement save—there.

No more than fifty yards from the spot on which he lay, she was walking slowly down the hill towards the house. She moved with the gracefulness of ripening corn when the breeze sweeps over it ; in fancy he could hear the rustle of her gown and smell the exotic fragrance of her hair.

" It is my lady," he said to himself. " Sir Cuthbert must be with her, though I cannot see him in this light. They couldn't have seen me, else she wouldn't walk so slowly." He rose and stretched himself. " Ah ! 'Cholic,' " he said to his thoughts, " I would that you had spoken the truth when you named the shell with the number on it, for of what use is a healthy body without a healthy mind, and this one of mine left a little of itself with you in France. . . . How long have I been here ? What brought me here ? 'Cholic' I give it up. Lights out ! I'm going to turn in. . . . Orderly ! put my 'kips' down !"

He strode down the hillside to the cottage.

Five years had passed, it is a Sunday morning in June, and through the fields and along the lanes the villagers are making their way to the church. The servants from the big house are never a moment late ; they take their place in the last pew, and Manton, the steward, has his seat next the aisle ; he is of them, yet apart. The family pew is immediately beneath the pulpit : Careys have occupied that pew for centuries. When the service is ended the restive villagers move eagerly from their places, for customs have changed since the day when none might move until the Squire had risen. Only the family servants remained in their place until my lady, stately in her widowhood, confident of chivalry, has passed down the aisle. Sir Cuthbert Carey died a few weeks after the birth of his heir ; the boy walks by the side of his mother with the dignity and bearing of a protector, yet always he dares to turn and smile as he passes Manton. A handsome child holding all the promise of stalwart manhood.

And his curls are as fair as the sun-ripened corn, and in his laughing eyes there is the shine of the moon when it bathes its face in the dew-pond high up on the Down slopes.





## LOUIS GOLDING

### *Lady and Shadow*

Louis Golding, novelist, essayist and lecturer, spends most of his time tramping along the remoter shores of the Mediterranean, and seems able to write brilliantly under conditions of discomfort that few authors would endure. Of his many novels *Magnolia Street*, a powerful study of Jewish life, is the most remarkable.



## LADY AND SHADOW

### I

**I**OLANDA and Francesca di Sant' Agata were identical twins. It is not enough to say of them that they were biologically identical. They were psychologically identical, too, in the operations of their minds and hearts. Twins as indistinguishable as these in a lower order of society, or even in their own order of society in another region than Southern Italy, would have found it impossible to resist the blandishments of music-hall or cinema magnates. They would have been converted into Sisters as illustrious as Les Dolly or Les Trix.

But no such destiny was written down for them. They were the daughters of the Conte di Sant' Agata, whose family had lived in those odorous uplands south of Naples for more centuries than the tenure of many a Royal dynasty. Their mother had died when they were six months old, and they passed into the somewhat abstracted care of their father, which they disputed with his devotion to the science of viticulture. It was his ambition to grow a vine in his ancestral territories which would rival the most delicate growths of Bordeaux. His almost successes were more heart-breaking than failures; so that he withdrew himself more and more from the world into his vineyards and cool laboratories, into an exile shared only by his lovely twin daughters.

The Conte di Sant' Agata did not pursue, for the sake of his own palate's pleasure, this chimerical Bordeaux grape which the harsh soil and the fierce sun of the Sorrentine Peninsula should engender. He was himself a man who drank little, who ate sparsely, who was, in fact, of an austerity rarely associated with, though frequently found in, Mediterranean blood. He was, in fact, a dreamer; and the fantastic identity of his two daughters increased rather than diminished the unreality of the world he lived in.

The daughters loved their father dearly, and feared him a

little more than loved him. It could not be said of them that they loved each other, they were not sufficiently conscious that they were, in fact, two separate people. They ate and drank the same things, sang the same songs, thought the same thoughts. They were rarely apart from each other, and when they were their communion was uninterrupted. Neither of them developed even a headache which the other did not share, and if one scratched or bruised herself at some distance from her sister, her sister shared her pain, though there was no mark of bruise or scratch.

It was not until their twentieth year that the two girls were separated from each other for a period of time. It happened in this way. During two or three years Francesca had developed each autumn an affection of the throat, the discomfort of which Iolande regularly shared with her, though her throat showed no sign of mischief. It was at length decided that Francesca should go into Naples to be operated on by a responsible surgeon, and, of course, that Iolanda should accompany her to see her through her convalescence. It was not considered necessary, of course, for the Conte, who was becoming a little infirm, to exile himself from his laboratories.

Francesca was duly operated on, not with success, as it later transpired. It was notable, even in the strange history of the two sisters, that at the moment the knife was conducting its work among the tissues of Francesca's throat, Iolanda's throat bled, too. Can it be wondered, then, that though the two girls themselves recognized the necessity, for domestic and social purposes, of maintaining the distinction between themselves as Francesca and Iolanda, to them the distinction seemed merely a convention, almost a myth? Indeed, when they were quite alone, they sometimes imperceptibly found themselves each calling the other by her own name, for to them it was an interchange merely of a name, not of a personality. On those occasions it required an act of firm readjustment before Francesca and Iolanda became in their own minds Francesca and Iolanda again.

It was not more than two or three days after Francesca's operation in Naples that the two girls were first separated. News was brought that the old man had fallen from one of his own wine-terraces and suffered a compound fracture of the leg; complications had set in, and the doctor at Sorrento advised Iolanda's immediate return, if it was at all possible for

Francesca to spare her. There seemed nothing else at all for Iolanda to do but to return, more particularly as she was assured that the operation on Francesca had been a complete success. It seemed to both girls on the first night of their separation that each was left with only two of her four limbs and only half of her heart. And the fact that the operation was to prove so mournful a failure, was largely attributed by both girls to that night's hideous desolation, though it was only Iolanda who gave words to the thought on the night of her supreme anguish.

The months that followed for Iolanda in her father's house above Sorrento began in wretchedness and ended in ecstasy. They were wretched because Francesca's convalescence protracted itself for weeks more than had been anticipated, and because her father, kept away from his test-tubes and manures, proved a very fractious patient.

But they ended in ecstasy. For, some three months after the separation from Francesca, she met a young man, a writer. They met on an anemone-carpeted upland near Agerola. They stopped. They gazed into each other's eyes with as much rapture as dismay. They were enraptured because it seemed impossible to each that a person so lovely as the other could exist. They were dismayed because she had allowed twenty years, and he thirty to go by, without attaining awareness that the other existed.

And one moment later a third emotion supervened in Iolanda's heart upon the two others. She felt as if a nail had been thrust between her ribs. She had a vision of Francesca lying pale and helpless in her bed in Naples. She was aware of the infamy of her moment's disloyalty.

She turned away from the stranger, her cheeks flaring. She walked away from him, out of his sight, and throwing herself behind a bush of myrtle, cried till she was half-dead with crying.

But she met the young man again. He had intended a night or two later to descend to Sorrento, where the Naples boat called, and so to go on to the island of Capri, where he lived. But he did not. He found out from the people of Sant' Agata who the beautiful creature was he had met on the chestnut slopes of Agerola, and presented himself with the utmost formality at the house of the Conte di Sant' Agata.

Enrico di Sarola lived at the Villa Apponale, a lovely villa

on the heights of Anacapri, looking down on a peacock sea of water and a silver sea of olives. He was young, and he was a complete hermit. The reason for his self-imposed incarceration behind the high garden-walls of his villa was a topic which for several years had occupied the ingenious malice of the Capresi, till at length it was superseded by some later and spicier dilemma. It was only known that he had left his mother in her old age, as alone as himself in their vast family house in Salerno, after a frightful quarrel; that he had then gone to become a left-bank intellectual in Paris, and had left Paris some six years ago, for some dark reason which had baffled every effort to illumine it.

He had left Capri, and, indeed, the confines of his own garden, once only during these last six years. That was only a few weeks ago. He had gone to Salerno, to bury his mother, having made quite sure (it was rumoured) that he had given her ample time to die before he reached her. And being free at last of some terror which had paralysed him, he had determined to walk along the steep spine of hills between Salerno and Sorrento, before returning to the labours that absorbed him in Anacapri.

The Conte recognized in Enrico di Sarola a man after his own heart, an aristocrat of equal lineage and a scholar as passionately as himself devoted to his theme. Enrico postponed his departure to his books and his villa. If it should take him three weeks or three years he was determined he would not go till both the father and the daughter agreed that he might take Iolanda away with him as his wife.

The Conte put up no resistance to the idea. He felt that the appearance of Enrico was entirely providential. Iolanda had not been as satisfactory a nurse as she might have been, for she was always worrying about her absent sister. It would have been exactly the same thing, he knew, if Iolanda had been away and Francesca left at home to look after him. With one of the girls safely married and to such an admirable young man, too, the other would devote herself to her father with the zeal he deserved from her.

"So now you know exactly how I feel about it, Enrico," he said, though what he had said and what he actually felt were far from the same thing. "You have my blessing, my boy, but you've got to remember Francesca. Francesca's not going to give up Iolanda without a struggle, you know."

"I can't believe Francesca will get in the way of Iolanda's happiness," insisted Enrico, "not if she loves Iolanda as much as Iolanda loves her. It wouldn't be fair, sir, it wouldn't be fair!"

"I suppose it wouldn't," said the Conte. "Yet I've sometimes thought the only way out for them would be if they both married the same man. Ha! Ha! Ha!" He laughed uproariously. He thought it a good joke.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" echoed Enrico. His laughter sounded in his own ears a little flat, a little dubious. "The real trouble is Iolanda," he continued glumly. "Yet I know she loves me, Conte. I mean—she's told me!"

Yes, there was no doubt about it. Iolanda loved Enrico di Sarola. She loved him desperately, as if she were putting into this one emotion which she did not share with her sister, a wildness which had been absent from all her shared emotions. She luxuriated in it. Her eyes burned with it.

Then, suddenly, she remembered Francesca. Her joy crashed to earth like a shot bird.

"I can't marry you! I won't!" she cried, wringing her hands. "I can't leave Francesca! Go away! Why did you ever come here?" Then he took her hands and kissed the tears away from her eyes. "Hush, darling! It'll be all right! We'll just wait till Francesca comes home. She'll put everything right! She'll be home in a week or two, now. Or, if you like, we can go and see her in Naples?"

"No! No!" Iolanda burst out in horror. "How could you say such a thing! I'll go myself! Yes, if you could stay with father here, I'll go and stay with her till the doctors say she can get away. Then I'll bring her back! And you must be gone when we get back here again. Then—then——"

"Then if Francesca says it will be the happiest day in her life, when we two get married . . . we will, won't we? And she will! I know she will!"

"I will do what Francesca wishes me to do!" said Iolanda sombrely. "I'll go to Naples the day after to-morrow!"

But Iolanda did not go to Naples, for on the very next day Francesca herself came back from Naples. She had just walked out of the french window of her bedroom and come away. She had come away not because they had said that another operation was necessary. She had not come away for her own sake at all.



"No, Iolanda! It's you I came back for! I couldn't bear to know you were so unhappy!"

"You knew, Francesca, you knew?"

"Iolanda!" She looked at her sister reproachfully from under her heavy eyelids. "How can you ask whether I knew?"

"Oh, but it was wicked of you to come away! For my sake as well as yours!"

"It was not, my sweet! There's no hope for me. I know better than the doctors! I am dying!"

"Oh, Francesca, Francesca! No! Say no! Do you know what you're saying? Francesca, never say such a thing again! You'll make me think that because I let myself listen to that Salernitan . . . But I promise you! I won't ever let him talk to me again! I'll tell him he must leave to-morrow, to-night!"

"No! You'll do nothing of the kind! You'll tell him that you'll marry him after I'm dead. Tell him he must go in a few days. I may live for a week or two or a month or two. Then you two will get married!"

"If you are going to die, I would rather die, too!"

"But I'm not going to die. Not if you're still alive, Iolanda! And if you marry him, Iolanda, I will be married to him, too!"

"Francesca, you are breaking my heart!"

"My darling, I am not only Francesca. I am Iolanda. And you are not only Iolanda. You are Francesca."

"Yes. Yes, my love. We are both Iolanda and Francesca. So you will forgive me if I marry him?"

"If you marry him, I will not be dead."

Francesca died some seven weeks later. Seven months later Iolanda di Sant' Agata and Enrico di Sarola were married. The Conte di Sant' Agata was furious. He could not make up his mind which of his daughters had treated him more disgracefully.

## II

After his marriage Enrico did not throw down the walls of his reserve. He had merely made a breach for Iolanda to enter, and after she had entered, he walled up the breach again. Iolanda was not in the least lonely. She had never lived a social existence. She had never had more than one companion, or at most, two, if her father could be considered a companion.

Here, on Anacapri as there above Sorrento, she had thymy hills to climb and exquisite sea to look down upon. She loved Enrico and Enrico loved her. She was profoundly interested in his work. She was happy and he was happy, happier than either had ever been before. It went on like that for two years.

During those first two years, she paid only one visit to her father at Sorrento. He had completely recovered from the effects of his fracture, and had thrown himself at least as arduously as before into his viticultural labours. It was only during his illness, he realized, that he had had the feeling that it would be useful to have one or the other of his daughters about the place. But he was well now. Francesca was dead. Iolanda was married. It might have been worse.

It was only once, then, during those two years, that Iolanda visited her father—about three or four months after her marriage. On the whole, she was relieved to find that the old man could get on quite well without her. And so was Enrico. He spent many hours away from her, but it put him at ease to know she was somewhere within hailing distance, somewhere across a terrace of anemones or a cliff of jonquils.

And then, when two years had gone by, quite suddenly she got into the habit of visiting her father every two or three weeks. She only spend a few hours with him, for she took the morning boat and invariably came back the same evening. It hardly seemed worth the journey, you might have thought. But if Iolanda wanted to visit her father, that was all there was to be said about it. Iolanda must visit her father. The old man was, in fact, getting older.

Enrico did not accompany her on her journeyings down to the harbour, nor go down to greet her on her return. It meant passing through the village of Capri, which he disliked even more than Anacapri, the rival village on the plateau. He loved the Villa Apponale so much, exactly because when once you had passed between its tall gate-posts, you had turned your back on the whole world and the last few centuries of its history.

A third year passed. Excepting for Iolanda's frequent journeys to Sorrento, Enrico and she were never separated by more than a few acres of thymy air, and then for not more than a few hours. When they looked back on the eventless felicity of these three years, it seemed sometimes that they had

been married a hundred years, sometimes one blue day and one sweet night.

And then, on a certain day, it happened that Enrico was forced from his desk by a fierce headache, a malady to which he had once been a frequent victim, but now, he had imagined, uprooted from his system. Finding it impossible to go on working, he paced the garden terraces for a time in the vain hope that air and movement might put him to rights. He left the gardens, hardly knowing he did so; and in that same dimness took the stony path up to Anacapri and the broad road down to Capri itself. It was only when he was actually half-way down to the harbour that he realized he had been making blindly for Iolanda, who alone might be comforting to him, and who, he realized with a start, was due from Sorrento, where that same day she had been paying one of her too frequent visits. He realized a little crossly, and for the first time, that his wife's visits to her father were too frequent. A wife's place was by her husband. Who knew when a headache might not swoop on him out of the void, even though it had left him for years?

The road wound steeply down to the little beach. Over a low wall on his left hand he had a clear view of the harbour. The boat was in. The passengers were already being disembarked in small skiffs. He saw the first skiff come to against the steps of the breakwater. It did not contain Iolanda. It was a long way below him, but his eyesight was extremely keen and he could see quite clearly it did not contain Iolanda.

The second skiff came to, and the third. The harbour women seized the luggage with brawny arms, lifted it to their heads and strode over with it to the funicular. The harbour men sat on the breakwater and spat into the water. The last boat-load came to. There was no Iolanda.

Enrico stood and stared. The hammer of his headache beat remorselessly. He made a movement downward in the direction of the harbour, as if someone down there must know why Iolanda, who had gone to Sorrento that morning, had not returned that evening. A moment later an opposite impulse tugged at him, to go running up the hill to the platform of the funicular, and find out there if he had not made a mistake. He had merely not recognized Iolanda. She had gone up the funicular. She was on her way this very moment to the Villa Apponale.

The two impulses tugging at him thus from opposite directions kept him rooted where he stood. He stood there scowling furiously, his head throbbing without respite he did not know how long. The siren hooted stridently. He did not hear it. The steamer was returning to Sorrento. "Who is travelling to Sorrento that evening?" the siren cried. "Who is staying in Capri?"

But those were not the questions that occupied Enrico's pulsing brain. Where was Iolanda? Why had she not come back from Sorrento? Had she not gone at all to Sorrento? What? Had she *ever* at all gone to Sorrento? What's that? If she had never gone to Sorrento, where had she been? With whom had she stayed? Body of Christ, with whom?

The funicular began to disgorge the passengers for the mainland. Because it was less painful not to move than to move, Enrico stood where he had been standing this last hour, two hours, three hours. The skiffs made out to the puffing steamer and came back again. There was one more boat-load to go, a scanty one. It was getting dark. It was not so easy to see as it had been; and what was there to see?

His heart suddenly turned round within him like a rusty knife. What was there to see? Her head lifted, her eyes looking towards the first stars, Iolanda sat in the prow of the small boat. He knew it was Iolanda as surely as he knew he was himself.

Iolanda? It was impossible! What could Iolanda be doing, leaving the island at this hour? Iolanda, his wife, his darling!

"Iolanda! Iolanda!" he called out. She could not have heard him had she been twenty feet away, his voice was so thin and faint and broken. "Iolanda! Iolanda!" She did not turn her head. The skiff drew up against the dropped gangway. He saw her swing up from the boat and ascend to the deck. She stood for a moment, a tiny figure, almost no more than a blur of shadow, facing him. He lunged forward towards her, as if there were no wall, no cliff, no sea, and in that same instant, in a huge, dark cloud, she was obliterated, with all the world he had known till then.

### III

From some reserve of hypnotic energy he had not suspected in himself, he derived the force to cover some portion of his

return journey, without actually being aware that he was moving once more. His headache had gone, but had left in its place a sense of emptiness which was more desolate than any mere positive pain could be. He seemed to have travelled the distance of half a province before he at length regained the Villa Apponale. The dogs made no sound as he passed through the gates, as if he were a ghost, or little more. The rear of the house was in complete darkness, but the house fronted the sea, and as he turned the angle of the terrace, he saw a light burning in the sitting-room. A light? In the sitting-room? Of course, that was one of the servants. No wonder the servants were alarmed with both the signora and the signore setting out and neither returning.

He pressed down the latch of the French window that opened out on the terrace, thrust through the curtains that hung there, and entered the room. A woman sat in the deep chair beyond the lamp. She was asleep, her head fallen on her bosom. It was Iolanda.

"Iolanda!" he cried out. "Iolanda!" His body moved towards her from the waist, but his legs were ice from the feet to the knees. She did not hear him.

"Iolanda! You are not here at all!"

She still made no sign. Her bosom rose and fell softly. Her long lashes lay on her cheeks like a long silken fringe.

"I saw you going away, I tell you," he said, as if, in fact, there had been an argument between them.

She did not hear him. He stood staring at her, a sense of phantasmal uncertainty creeping along his veins, like a mist in marshy country. His scalp crackled and tingled like the shallow water in marshes, stiffening into thin ice.

She opened her eyes at length. They did not seem to open by way of response to the presence of another human creature. For a few moments her eyes were vague and strange, as if, even now that the lids were lifted, they did not behold the same things as his eyes beheld, the book-case against the wall, the table, the bronze urn with flowers. Then she saw him. Her eyes took the impress of eyes that register the existence of things loved and familiar. She rose from her chair. "Enrico!" she cried out, "Enrico! Where have you been all day! Has anything been the matter, darling? Why didn't you tell the servants you were going out?"

For one moment indignation blazed up in him furiously.

Somehow, he could not begin to conceive how, she had played a most infamous trick on him. She had not gone to Sorrento by the early boat, for she had not returned from Sorrento by the late boat. On the contrary, she had *left* for Sorrento by the late boat. He could not begin to admit the possibility of a doubt. It had been she. It had been Iolanda. She had left for Sorrento by the late boat.

Then how was it she came here? How was it she looked at him so innocently with her large and lovely eyes, asking where *he* had been? Where had *she* been? Who was she?

He would go mad. He felt the headache start up behind his eyes again like a beast getting up in its den. He could not talk. He could not bear to say a word. He turned away from her.

"What's the matter, darling? You're not cross, are you? Are you ill?"

"I've had a headache. Don't talk to me, please. Let's get to bed."

Once or twice before she had known him in a black mood, though never so black as this, and never with her as the object of its rancour.

"Yes, darling," she whispered. "I'm coming." She followed him quietly as a cat.

He said not a word as he undressed. His fingers fumbled clumsily with studs and buttons. She was in bed a good ten minutes before he was.

She lay upon her back, her pale face on the pillow, her eyes staring miserably into the ceiling. She did not turn away with her back to him for fear she should anger him more. She did not lie on her side facing him, for fear he should think she was trying to wheedle him into a good temper. She looked very pathetic as she lay there.

He felt a quick spasm of remorse. "I say, Iolanda. I'm awfully sorry. I'm sure it's all a mistake."

"Yes, yes," she said eagerly. "Of course it is, it's all a mistake."

He drew back. "What's a mistake?" he shouted. "How do you know there's a mistake? Eh, tell me that?"

"But, darling, please, you said so. So I said so."

"Did I? I suppose I did!" he said surlily. "I suppose I'm a fool! I *know* I'm a fool! Give me some room,

Iolanda!" She moved. "Thank you. Kiss me!" he ordered her. "Why don't you kiss me?"

"Because, because——"

"Well, kiss me."

She bent towards him and put her lips on his. There was a scent about her he had never noticed before, a scent like the flowers in dank woody places. Her lips were cold as the petals of those flowers. A shudder passed through his body.

"What's the matter, darling? Please let me do something! Shall I get up?"

"My head, that's all! It'll be better to-morrow! I'm sorry, Iolanda! Go to sleep!"

"Good night, dear one!"

"Good night!"

Her eyelids drooped slowly down over her eyes. Her loveliness in that dim light was almost too much to bear, a thing almost too delicate to be of this world at all. He reached to the switch and snapped the light off abruptly.

But he did not go to sleep.

He did not go to sleep, for the torment of his bewilderment grew more and more desperate. How could Iolanda be here, in bed beside him, when Iolanda had taken the boat to Sorrento? Iolanda must be in Sorrento. Perhaps she had gone further, to Naples? Whom could Iolanda have gone to be with in Naples?

But she was not in Naples. She was not in Sorrento. She was here, in Anacapri, here in bed beside him alive and warm and breathing.

A vein pulsed in his left temple regularly, remorselessly, like a cog half-turning in a machine.

Who had gone away on the Sorrento boat? Who was in bed here beside him, her white fingers fluttering on the coverlet?

Suddenly his hand shot forward, driven by an impulse more furious and hopeless than had ever possessed him before. His fingers closed round Iolanda's bare shoulder.

"Who are you?" he cried. "Who are you?"

She got up with a cry out of her sleep. "Don't, Enrico! Don't! You're hurting me!"

"Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?"

" Enrico, what's happened ? Enrico, let me go to sleep ! Take your hand away, Enrico ! Are you mad ? "

" How have you got here ? I saw you take the boat to Sorrento ! "

" That wasn't me ! "

" What do you mean it wasn't you ? "

" I mean you made a mistake, Enrico ! "

" Why did you say ' that wasn't me ' ? Who was it ? "

" I don't know ! "

" You don't know ? Who are you, I want to know ! " He reached out his hand and switched the light on. He gazed down into her face wildly. " But you're Iolanda ! How do you come here ? Of course you're Iolanda ! "

" Of course I am ! You see, darling ? "

" But I saw you on the Sorrento boat ! "

" Let me go to sleep, Enrico ! It's your headache ! You'll be all right in the morning ! " She stretched out her arms and yawned. " I'm so sleepy, Enrico. You kept me waiting up for you so long ! "

" Open your mouth again ! " he shouted at her.

" Why, of course ! "

She opened her mouth, revealing her perfect teeth. Enrico stared into them with the incredulous fixity of a scientist who perceives in his test-tube the dawning solution of some monstrous, some almost superhuman problem.

These teeth were not perfect, they were not quite perfect in so much as there was a fissure between the two central teeth in the upper layer. The teeth of Iolanda had no imperfection. How came it that between the two central upper teeth of this woman lying in the bed there lay a dark, narrow line of separation ? There once lived a woman whose upper teeth were so separated. That woman was Francesca, the dead sister of Iolanda. It was only in that minute particular there had been any distinction at all in the physical constitution of Iolanda and Francesca.

The teeth of this woman in the bed were the teeth of the dead Francesca, not the living Iolanda. This was the dead Francesca in bed beside him, not the living Iolanda.

His nostrils were filled with graveyard stench. The hair on his head stiffened like wires. " Get out ! " he shrieked. " Get out ! Get out ! " He seemed to know no other words in the world than these. " Get out ! Get out ! Get out ! "



" Enrico ! Enrico ! Why do you shout at me like that ! What has happened ? Darling, darling, what has happened ? "

" Who are you ? "

" I am Iolanda ! "

" You are not Iolanda ! I saw Iolanda getting into the Sorrento boat ! You are not Iolanda ! "

She drew breath and then slowly expelled it from her lungs again, from so deep down in her lungs that it might have been thought no breath could ever inhabit there again. Her fingers that had been flickering so anxiously lay flaccid like dead flowers.

" I am Iolanda ! " she said, in a voice that came from the other side of the great distance and great darkness. " I am Iolanda ! The other was Iolanda, too ! She is the same as I ! "

" You are Francesca ! " he shrieked. " No ! No ! It's not true ! You are not Francesca ! Say you are not Francesca ! "

" I am Francesca ! And she was Francesca, too, on the boat to Sorrento ! "

" You are dead ! You are a ghost ! You are an evil spirit ! "

" She would not live here without me. I could not live there unless she came, too, now and again, for a brief time. "

" If you could not leave me alone, could you not leave her alone, who loved you so much ? "

" We tried. We found it impossible. We could not live or die separately. We had to share our lives and our deaths ! "

" My little Iolanda ! My poor, poor little Iolanda. " He put his hands to his eyes and shook his head and moaned. He moaned long and loud like a dog crying on the grave of his master. Then the moaning died away. He removed his hands from his eyes. He looked down at the girl again, lying pale below him, hardly without substance. His eyes glared fearfully out of their sockets.

" She is as hateful as you ! She has deceived me just as you have deceived me ! You have brought on me the most hideous dishonour. You are fiends, you are fiends ! Get back, both of you, to the hell you belong to ! "

He spread his fingers wide and brought his hands nearer and nearer to her throat.

" My poor, poor dear, " she said. " You can do me no hurt at all ! "

His hands fell limply from the wrists. He fell heaped into a chair and covered his face with his hands. He swayed from

side to side soundlessly for minute upon minute. Then he spoke, but it was to himself he spoke, for there was no other mortal there to speak to.

"What shall I do? What shall I do? How can I know. what to do, all alone, without help?" He asked himself the question again and again. Then the words ceased on his lips. He rose from his chair, walked over to his wardrobe and began to dress, like a man dressing himself on the day of his execution.

"Enrico! What are you doing? Where are you going?"

"I am going to Sorrento. I must ask advice and help from the Conte di Sant' Agata!"

"Enrico! I beg you! For Iolanda's sake! For my father's sake! Don't go!"

"It's too much for mortal man to bear alone!"

"Don't go, I beg you! It will do no good! It will kill the old man! He is on the edge of the grave already!"

"You'll have company there!"

"He must not come with a broken heart!"

"You should have thought of that earlier!"

"Don't go, I beg you!"

"Quiet, you harpy, you hell-hag, quiet! Get back! Who asked you here?"

"Are you determined to go to Sorrento?"

"By the morning boat."

"You will meet Iolanda, when she lands!"

"There is no more Iolanda!"

Francesca said nothing. She lay with closed eyes. He finished dressing.

"Do you mean that?" she said.

"There is no more Iolanda! She is as dead as you are!"

He walked over to the door and spoke once again, without turning. "Get out where you belong!" he said.

#### IV

He saw Iolanda when she stepped ashore, but she did not see him. He hid till she had crossed over to the funicular and had been carried away out of his sight. She set out on the winding road to Anacapri, passed through the higher village, and took the obscure path to the tiny myrtle-clad glade where

she and Francesca met on these days of their reunion, where she and Francesca passed the dim hours together, till it was judged that returners by the evening boat from Sorrento might be thought due home.

Francesca was waiting there, as often before. She took her sister's warm in her own cold hands. "This is the last time we must meet here," she said.

"My darling, don't talk like that! Why do you look at me so strangely?"

"He knows, Iolanda!"

"He knows? Francesca, Francesca, it can't be true!"

"It is true!"

"Say it isn't true, Francesca!"

"It is true!"

Iolanda paused. She looked round at the ilexes, the myrtle-shrubs, she looked up to the sky above her head and down to the sea below her feet. "What shall we do?" she said.

"There is nothing to do but to go, now, Iolanda."

"You and I together, Francesca?"

"Would you rather stay alone, Iolanda?"

"Must I leave Enrico alone, Francesca?"

"There is no more Enrico now!"

"I shall go with you, Iolanda, where you go!"

"Shall we wait a little?"

"There is nothing left here."

"Shall we take the path down to the little beach under the cliff?"

"Yes."

"The little boat will be there, Iolanda."

"Where we've been so happy together, so often."

"Shall we go down now?"

"It would be better not to wait any more."

They took the path down to the beach under the cliff. They loosened the boat from its moorings.

"You'll take the rudder, Iolanda. You look tired. I'll take the oars."

"Yes," whispered Iolanda. "You take the oars."

So they went forth and made into the west. Cypress and olive faded, white cliff faded. Only sea and sky remained now, for the dead girl and the living girl. They did not come back again out of the blue waste of waters.

# FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

## *A Little Hero*

Fyodor Dostoevsky was one of the giants of Russian literature, and understood his country and his countrymen better than writers who came more under European influence. In spite of constant poverty and ill-health and a spell of four years exile in Siberia, he wrote several of the great books of the world, notably *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazoff*.



## A LITTLE HERO

AT that time I was nearly eleven. I had been sent in July to spend the holiday in a village near Moscow with a relation of mine called T., whose house was full of guests, fifty, or perhaps more. . . . I don't remember, I didn't count. The house was full of noise and gaiety. It seemed as though it were a continual holiday, which would never end. It seemed as though our host had taken a vow to squander all his vast fortune as rapidly as possible, and he did indeed succeed, not long ago, in justifying this surmise, that is, in making a clean sweep of it all to the last stick.

Fresh visitors used to drive up every minute. Moscow was close by, in sight, so that those who drove away only made room for others, and the everlasting holiday went on its course. Festivities succeeded one another, and there was no end in sight to the entertainments. There were riding parties about the environs; excursions to the forest or the river; picnics, dinners in the open air; suppers on the great terrace of the house, bordered with three rows of gorgeous flowers that flooded with their fragrance the fresh night air, and illuminated the brilliant lights which made our ladies, who were almost every one of them pretty at all times, seem still more charming, with their faces excited by the impressions of the day, with their sparkling eyes, with their interchange of spritely conversation, their peals of ringing laughter; dancing, music, singing; if the sky were overcast *tableaux vivants*, charades, proverbs were arranged, private theatricals were got up. There were good talkers, story-tellers, wits.

Certain persons were prominent in the foreground. Of course backbiting and slander ran their course, as without them the world could not get on, and millions of persons would perish of boredom, like flies. But as I was at that time eleven I was absorbed by very different interests, and either failed to observe these people, or if I noticed anything, did not see it all. It was only afterwards that some things came back to my mind. My childish eyes could only see the brilliant side of the picture,

and the general animation, splendour, and bustle—all that, seen and heard for the first time, made such an impression upon me that for the first few days, I was completely bewildered and my little head was in a whirl.

I keep speaking of my age, and of course I was a child, nothing more than a child. Many of these lovely ladies petted me without dreaming of considering my age. But strange to say, a sensation which I did not myself understand already had possession of me ; something was already whispering in my heart, of which till then it had had no knowledge, no conception, and for some reason it began all at once to burn and throb, and often my face glowed with a sudden flush. At times I felt as it were abashed, and even resentful of the various privileges of my childish years. At other times a sort of wonder overwhelmed me, and I would go off into some corner where I could sit unseen, as though to take breath and remember something—something which it seemed to me I had remembered perfectly till then, and now had suddenly forgotten, something without which I could not show myself anywhere, and could not exist at all.

At last it seemed to me as though I were hiding something from every one. But nothing would have induced me to speak of it to any one, because, small boy that I was, I was ready to weep with shame. Soon in the midst of the vortex around me I was conscious of a certain loneliness. There were other children, but all were either much older or younger than I ; besides, I was in no mood for them. Of course nothing would have happened to me if I had not been in an exceptional position. In the eyes of those charming ladies I was still the little unformed creature whom they at once liked to pet, and with whom they could play as though he were a little doll. One of them particularly, a fascinating, fair woman, with very thick, luxuriant hair, such as I had never seen before and probably shall never see again, seemed to have taken a vow never to leave me in peace. I was confused, while she was amused by the laughter which she continually provoked from all around us by her wild, giddy pranks with me, and this apparently gave her immense enjoyment. At school among her schoolfellows she was probably nicknamed the Tease. She was wonderfully good-looking, and there was something in her beauty which drew one's eyes from the first moment. And certainly she had nothing in common with the ordinary

modest little fair girls, white as down and soft as white mice, or pastors' daughters. She was not very tall, and was rather plump, but had soft, delicate, exquisitely cut features. There was something quick as lightning in her face, and indeed she was like fire all over, light, swift, alive. Her big open eyes seemed to flash sparks; they glittered like diamonds, and I would never exchange such blue sparkling eyes for any black ones, were they blacker than any Andalusian orb. And, indeed, my blonde was fully a match for the famous brunette whose praises were sung by a great and well-known poet, who, in a superb poem, vowed by all Castille that he was ready to break his bones to be permitted only to touch the mantle of his divinity with the tip of his finger. Add to that, that *my* charmer was the merriest in the world, the wildest giggler, playful as a child, although she had been married for the last five years. There was a continual laugh upon her lips, fresh as the morning rose that, with the first ray of sunshine, opens its fragrant crimson bud with the cool dewdrops still hanging heavy upon it.

I remember that the day after my arrival private theatricals were being got up. The drawing-room was, as they say, packed to overflowing; there was not a seat empty, and as I was somehow late I had to enjoy the performance standing. But the amusing play attracted me to move forwarder and forwarder, and unconsciously I made my way to the first row, where I stood at last leaning my elbows on the back of an arm-chair, in which a lady was sitting. It was my blonde divinity, but we had not yet made acquaintance. And I gazed, as it happened, at her marvellous, fascinating shoulders, plump and white as milk, though it did not matter to me in the least whether I stared at a woman's exquisite shoulders or at the cap with flaming ribbons that covered the grey locks of a venerable lady in the front row. Near my blonde divinity sat a spinster lady not in her first youth, one of those who, as I chanced to observe later, always take refuge in the immediate neighbourhood of young and pretty women, selecting such as are not fond of cold-shouldering young men. But that is not the point, only this lady, noting my fixed gaze, bent down to her neighbour and with a simper whispered something in her ear. The blonde lady turned at once, and I remembered that her glowing eyes so flashed upon me in the half dark, that, not prepared to meet them, I started as though I were scalded. The beauty smiled.



"Do you like what they are acting?" she asked, looking into my face with a shy and mocking expression.

"Yes," I answered, still gazing at her with a sort of wonder that evidently pleased her.

"But why are you standing? You'll get tired. Can't you find a seat?"

"That's just it, I can't," I answered, more occupied with my grievance than with the beauty's sparkling eyes, and rejoicing in earnest at having found a kind heart to whom I could confide my troubles. "I have looked everywhere, but all the chairs are taken," I added, as though complaining to her that all the chairs were taken.

"Come here," she said briskly, quick to act on every decision, and, indeed, on every mad idea that flashed on her giddy brain, "come here, and sit on my knee."

"On your knee," I repeated, taken aback. I have mentioned already that I had begun to resent the privileges of childhood and to be ashamed of them in earnest. This lady, as though in derision, had gone ever so much further than the others. Moreover, I had always been a shy and bashful boy, and of late had begun to be particularly shy with women.

"Why yes, on my knee. Why don't you want to sit on my knee?" she persisted, beginning to laugh more and more, so that at last she was simply giggling, goodness knows at what, perhaps at her freak, or perhaps at my confusion. But that was just what she wanted.

I flushed, and in my confusion looked round trying to find where to escape; but seeing my intention she managed to catch hold of my hand to prevent me from going away, and pulling it towards her, suddenly, quite unexpectedly, to my intense astonishment, squeezed it in her mischievous warm fingers, and began to pinch my fingers till they hurt so much that I had to do my very utmost not to cry out, and in my effort to control myself made the most absurd grimaces. I was, besides, moved to the greatest amazement, perplexity, and even horror, at the discovery that there were ladies so absurd and spiteful as to talk nonsense to boys, and even pinch their fingers, for no earthly reason and before everybody. Probably my unhappy face reflected my bewilderment, for the mischievous creature laughed in my face, as though she were crazy, and meantime she was pinching my fingers more and more vigorously. She was highly delighted in playing such a mis-

chievous prank and completely mystifying and embarrassing a poor boy. My position was desperate. In the first place I was hot with shame, because almost every one near had turned round to look at us, some in wonder, others with laughter, grasping at once that the beauty was up to some mischief. I dreadfully wanted to scream, too, for she was wringing my fingers with positive fury just because I didn't scream; while I, like a Spartan, made up my mind to endure the agony, afraid by crying out of causing a general fuss, which was more than I could face. In utter despair I began at last struggling with her, trying with all my might to pull away my hand, but my persecutor was much stronger than I was. At last I could bear it no longer, and uttered a shriek—that was all she was waiting for! Instantly she let me go, and turned away as though nothing had happened, as though it was not she who had played the trick but someone else, exactly like some school-boy who, as soon as the master's back is turned, plays some trick on someone near him, pinches some small weak boy, gives him a flip, a kick, or a nudge with his elbow, and instantly turns again, buries himself in his book and begins repeating his lesson, and so makes a fool of the infuriated teacher, who flies down like a hawk at the noise.

But luckily for me the general attention was distracted at the moment by the masterly acting of our host, who was playing the chief part in the performance, some comedy of Scribe's. Everyone began to applaud; under cover of the noise I stole away and hurried to the farthest end of the room, from which, concealed behind a column, I looked with horror towards the place where the treacherous beauty was sitting. She was still laughing, holding her handkerchief to her lips. And for a long time she was continually turning round, looking for me in every direction, probably regretting that our silly tussle was so soon over, and hatching some other trick to play on me.

That was the beginning of our acquaintance, and from that evening she would never let me alone. She persecuted me without consideration or conscience, she became my tyrant and tormentor. The whole absurdity of her jokes with me lay in the fact that she pretended to be head over ears in love with me, and teased me before everyone. Of course for a wild creature as I was all this was so tiresome and vexatious that it almost reduced me to tears, and I was sometimes put in such a difficult position that I was on the point of fighting with my

treacherous admirer. My naïve confusion, my desperate distress, seemed to egg her on to persecute me more ; she knew no mercy, while I did not know how to get away from her. The laughter which always accompanied us, and which she knew so well how to excite, roused her to fresh pranks. But at last people began to think that she went a little too far in her jests. And, indeed, as I remember now, she did take outrageous liberties with a child such as I was.

But that was her character ; she was a spoilt child in every respect. I heard afterwards that her husband, a very short, very fat, and very red-faced man, very rich and apparently very much occupied with business, spoilt her more than anyone. Always busy and flying round, he could not stay two hours in one place. Every day he drove into Moscow, sometimes twice in the day, and always, as he declared himself, on business. It would be hard to find a livelier and more good-natured face than his facetious but always well-bred countenance. He not only loved his wife to the point of weakness, softness : he simply worshipped her like an idol.

He did not restrain her in anything. She had masses of friends, male and female. In the first place, almost everybody liked her ; and secondly, the feather-headed creature was not herself over particular in the choice of her friends, though there was a much more serious foundation to her character than might be supposed from what I have just said about her. But of all her friends she liked best of all one young lady, a distant relation, who was also of our party now. There existed between them a tender and subtle affection, one of those attachments which sometimes spring up at the meeting of two dispositions often the very opposite of each other, of which one is deeper, purer and more austere, while the other, with lofty humility, and generous self-criticism, lovingly gives way to the other, conscious of the friend's superiority and cherishing the friendship as a happiness. Then begins that tender and noble subtlety in the relations of such characters, love and infinite indulgence on the one side, on the other love and respect—a respect approaching awe, approaching anxiety as to the impression made on the friend so highly prized, and an eager, jealous desire to get closer and closer to that friend's heart in every step in life.

These two friends were of the same age, but there was an immense difference between them in everything—in looks, to

begin with. Madame M. was also very handsome, but there was something special in her beauty that strikingly distinguished her from the crowd of pretty women; there was something in her face that at once drew the affection of all to her, or rather, which aroused a generous and lofty feeling of kindness in everyone who met her. There are such happy faces. At her side everyone grew, as it were, better, freer, more cordial; and yet her big mournful eyes, full of fire and vigour, had a timid and anxious look, as though every minute dreading something antagonistic and menacing, and this strange timidity at times cast so mournful a shade over her mild, gentle features which recalled the serene faces of Italian Madonnas, that looking at her one soon became oneself sad, as though for some trouble of one's own. The pale, thin face, in which, through the irreproachable beauty of the pure, regular lines and the mournful severity of some mute hidden grief, there often flitted the clear looks of early childhood, telling of trustful years and perhaps simple-hearted happiness in the recent past, the gentle but diffident, hesitating smile, all aroused such unaccountable sympathy for her that every heart was unconsciously stirred with a sweet and warm anxiety that powerfully interceded on her behalf even at a distance, and made even strangers feel akin to her. But the lovely creature seemed silent and reserved, though no one could have been more attentive and loving if anyone needed sympathy. There are women who are like sisters of mercy in life. Nothing can be hidden from them, nothing, at least, that is a sore or wound of the heart. Anyone who is suffering may go boldly and hopefully to them without fear of being a burden, for few men know the infinite patience of love, compassion and forgiveness that may be found in some women's hearts. Perfect treasures of sympathy, consolation and hope are laid up in these pure hearts, so often full of suffering of their own—for a heart which loves much grieves much—though their wounds are carefully hidden from the curious eye, for deep sadness is most often mute and concealed. They are not dismayed by the depth of the wound, nor by its foulness and its stench; any one who comes to them is deserving of help; they are, as it were, born for heroism. . . . Mme M. was tall, supple and graceful, but rather thin. All her movements seemed somehow irregular, at times slow, smooth, and even dignified, at times childishly hasty; and yet, at the same time, there was a sort of timid

humility in her gestures, something tremulous and defenceless, though it neither desired nor asked for protection.

I have mentioned already that the outrageous teasing of the treacherous fair lady abashed me, flabbergasted me, and wounded me to the quick. But there was for that another secret, strange and foolish reason, which I concealed, at which I shuddered as at a skeleton. At the very thought of it, brooding, utterly alone and overwhelmed, in some dark mysterious corner to which the inquisitorial mocking eye of the blue-eyed rogue could not penetrate, I almost gasped with confusion, shame and fear—in short, I was in love; that perhaps is nonsense, that could hardly have been. But why was it, of all the faces surrounding me, only her face caught my attention? Why was it that it was only she whom I cared to follow with my eyes, though I certainly had no inclination in those days to watch ladies and seek their acquaintance? This happened most frequently on the evenings when we were all kept indoors by bad weather, and when, lonely, hiding in some corner of the big drawing-room, I stared about me aimlessly, unable to find anything to do, for except my teasing ladies, few people ever addressed me, and I was insufferably bored on such evenings. Then I stared at the people round me, listened to the conversation, of which I often did not understand one word, and at that time the mild eyes, the gentle smile and lovely face of Mme M. (for she was the object of my passion) for some reason caught my fascinated attention; and the strange, vague, but unutterably sweet impression remained with me. Often for hours together I could not tear myself away from her; I studied every gesture, every movement she made, listened to every vibration of her rich, silvery, but rather muffled voice; but, strange to say, as the result of all my observations, I felt, mixed with a sweet and timid impression, a feeling of intense curiosity. It seemed as though I were on the verge of some mystery.

Nothing distressed me so much as being mocked at in the presence of Mme M. This mockery and humorous persecution, as I thought, humiliated me. And when there was a general burst of laughter at my expense, in which Mme M. sometimes could not help joining, in despair, beside myself with misery, I used to tear myself from my tormentor and run away upstairs, where I remained in solitude the rest of the day, not daring to show my face in the drawing-room. I did not yet, however,

understand my shame nor my agitation ; the whole process went on in me unconsciously. I had hardly said two words to Mme M., and indeed I should not have dared to. But one evening after an unbearable day I turned back from an expedition with the rest of the company. I was horribly tired and made my way home across the garden. On a seat in a secluded avenue I saw Mme M. She was sitting quite alone, as though she had purposely chosen this solitary spot, her head was drooping and she was mechanically twisting her handkerchief. She was so lost in thought that she did not hear me till I reached her.

Noticing me, she got up quickly from her seat, turned round, and I saw her hurriedly wipe her eyes with her handkerchief. She was crying. Drying her eyes, she smiled to me and walked back with me to the house. I don't remember what we talked about ; but she frequently sent me off on one pretext or another, to pick a flower, or to see who was riding in the next avenue. And when I walked away from her, she at once put her handkerchief to her eyes again and wiped away rebellious tears, which would persist in rising again and again from her heart and dropping from her poor eyes. I realized that I was very much in her way when she sent me off so often, and, indeed, she saw herself that I noticed it all, but yet could not control herself, and that made my heart ache more and more for her. I raged at myself at that moment and was almost in despair ; cursed myself for my awkwardness and lack of resource, and at the same time did not know how to leave her tactfully, without betraying that I had noticed her distress, but walked beside her in mournful bewilderment, almost in alarm, utterly at a loss and unable to find a single word to keep up our scanty conversation.

This meeting made such an impression on me that I stealthily watched Mme M. the whole evening with eager curiosity, and never took my eyes off her. But it happened that she twice caught me unawares watching her, and on the second occasion, noticing me, she gave me a smile. It was the only time she smiled that evening. The look of sadness had not left her face, which was now very pale. She spent the whole evening talking to an ill-natured and quarrelsome old lady, whom nobody liked owing to her spying and backbiting habits, but of whom everyone was afraid, and consequently everyone felt obliged to be polite to her. . . .

At ten o'clock Mme M.'s husband arrived. Till that moment I watched her very attentively, never taking my eyes off her mournful face ; now at the unexpected entrance of her husband I saw her start, and her pale face turned suddenly as white as a handkerchief. It was so noticeable that other people observed it. I overheard a fragmentary conversation from which I guessed that Mme M. was not quite happy ; they said her husband was as jealous as an Arab, not from love, but from vanity. He was before all things a European, a modern man, who sampled the newest ideas and prided himself upon them. In appearance he was a tall, dark-haired, particularly thick-set man, with European whiskers, with a self-satisfied, red face, with teeth white as sugar, and with an irreproachably gentlemanly deportment. He was called a *clever man*. Such is the name given in certain circles to a peculiar species of mankind which grows fat at other people's expense, which does absolutely nothing and has no desire to do anything, and whose heart has turned into a lump of fat from everlasting slothfulness and idleness. You continually hear from such men that there is nothing they can do owing to certain very complicated and hostile circumstances, which "thwart their genius," and that it was "sad to see the waste of their talents." This is a fine phrase of theirs, their *mot d'ordre*, their watchword, a phrase which these well-fed fat friends of ours bring out at every minute, so that it has long ago bored us as an arrant Tartuffism, an empty form of words. Some, however, of these amusing creatures, who cannot succeed in finding anything to do—though, indeed, they never seek it—try to make everyone believe that they have not a lump of fat for a heart, but on the contrary something *very deep*, though what precisely the greatest surgeon would hardly venture to decide—from civility, of course. These gentlemen make their way in the world through the fact that all their instincts are bent in the direction of coarse sneering, short-sighted censure and immense conceit. Since they have nothing else to do but note and emphasize the mistakes and weaknesses of others, and as they have precisely as much good feeling as an oyster, it is not difficult for them with such powers of self-preservation to get on with people fairly successfully. They pride themselves extremely upon that. They are, for instance, as good as persuaded that almost the whole world owes them something ; that it is theirs, like an oyster which they keep in reserve ; that all are fools except

themselves ; that everyone is like an orange or a sponge, which they will squeeze as soon as they want the juice ; that they are the masters everywhere, and that all this acceptable state of affairs is solely due to the fact that they are people of so much intellect and character. In their measureless conceit they do not admit any defects in themselves, they are like that species of practical rogues, innate Tartuffes and Falstuffs, who are such thorough rogues that at last they have come to believe that that is as it should be, that is, that they should spend their lives in knavishness ; they have so often assured everyone that they are honest men, that they have come to believe that they are honest men, and that their roguery is honesty. They are never capable of inner judgment before their conscience, of generous self-criticism ; for some things they are too fat. Their own priceless personality, their Baal and Moloch, their magnificent *ego* is always in their foreground everywhere. All nature, the whole world for them is no more than a splendid mirror created for the little god to admire himself continually in it, and to see no one and nothing behind himself ; so it is not strange that he sees everything in the world in such a hideous light. He has a phrase in readiness for everything and—the acme of ingenuity on his part—the most fashionable phrase. It is just these people, indeed, who help to make the fashion, proclaiming at every cross-road an idea in which they scent success. A fine nose is just what they have for sniffing a fashionable phrase and making it their own before other people get hold of it, so that it seems to have originated with them. They have a particular store of phrases for proclaiming their profound sympathy for humanity, for defining what is the most correct and rational form of philanthropy, and continually attacking romanticism, in other words, everything fine and true, each atom of which is more precious than all their mollusc tribe. But they are too coarse to recognize the truth in an indirect, roundabout and unfinished form, and they reject everything that is immature, still fermenting and unstable. The well-nourished man has spent all his life in merry-making, with everything provided, has done nothing himself and does not know how hard every sort of work is, and so woe betide you if you jar upon his fat feelings by any sort of roughness ; he'll never forgive you for that, he will always remember it and will gladly avenge it. The long and short of it is, that my hero is neither more nor less than a gigantic, incredibly swollen bag,



full of sentences, fashionable phrases, and labels of all sorts and kinds.

M. M., however, had a speciality and was a very remarkable man ; he was a wit, good talker and story-teller, and there was always a circle round him in every drawing-room. That evening he was particularly successful in making an impression. He took possession of the conversation ; he was in his best form, gay, pleased at something, and he compelled the attention of all ; but Mme M. looked all the time as though she were ill ; her face was so sad that I fancied every minute that tears would begin quivering on her long eyelashes. All this, as I have said, impressed me extremely and made me wonder. I went away with a feeling of strange curiosity, and dreamed all night of M. M., though till then I had rarely had dreams.

Next day, early in the morning, I was summoned to a rehearsal of some *tableaux vivants* in which I had to take part. The *tableaux vivants*, theatricals, and afterwards a dance were all fixed for the same evening, five days later—the birthday of our host's younger daughter. To this entertainment, which was almost improvised, another hundred guests were invited from Moscow and from surrounding villas, so that there was a great deal of fuss, bustle and commotion. The rehearsal, or rather, review of the costumes, was fixed so early in the morning because our manager, a well-known artist, a friend of our host's, who had consented through affection for him to undertake the arrangement of the *tableaux* and the training of us for them, was in haste now to get to Moscow to purchase properties and to make final preparations for the fête, as there was no time to lose. I took part in one *tableau* with Mme M. It was a scene from medieval life and was called "The Lady of the Castle and Her Page."

I felt unutterably-confused on meeting Mme M. at the rehearsal. I kept feeling that she would at once read in my eyes all the reflections, the doubts, the surmises, that had arisen in my mind since the previous day. I fancied, too, that I was, as it were, to blame in regard to her, for having come upon her tears the day before and hindered her grieving, so that she could hardly help looking at me askance, as an unpleasant witness and unforgiven sharer of her secret. But, thank goodness, it went off without any great trouble ; I was simply not noticed. I think she had no thoughts to spare for me or for the rehearsal ; she was absent-minded, sad and gloomily

thoughtful ; it was evident that she was worried by some great anxiety. As soon as my part was over I ran away to change my clothes, and ten minutes later came out on the veranda into the garden. Almost at the same time Mme M. came out by another door, and immediately afterwards coming towards us appeared her self-satisfied husband, who was returning from the garden, after just escorting into it quite a crowd of ladies and there handing them over to a competent *cavalieré servente*. The meeting of the husband and wife was evidently unexpected. Mme M., I don't know why, grew suddenly confused, and a faint trace of vexation was betrayed in her impatient movement. The husband, who had been carelessly whistling an air and with an air of profundity stroking his whiskers, now, on meeting his wife, frowned and scrutinized her, as I remember now, with a markedly inquisitorial stare.

"You are going into the garden ?" he asked, noticing the parasol and book in her hand.

"No, into the copse," she said, with a slight flush.

"Alone ?"

"With him," said Mme M., pointing to me. "I always go a walk alone in the morning," she added, speaking in an uncertain, hesitating voice, as people do when they tell their first lie.

"H'm . . . and I have just taken the whole party there. They have all met there together in the flower arbour to see N. off. He is going away, you know. . . . Something has gone wrong in Odessa. Your cousin" (he meant the fair beauty) "is laughing and crying at the same time ; there is no making her out. She says, though, that you are angry with N. about something, and so wouldn't go and see him off. Nonsense, of course ?"

"She's laughing," said Mme M., coming down the veranda steps.

"So this is your daily *cavalieré servente*," added M. M., with a wry smile, turning his lorgnette upon me.

"Page !" I cried, angered by the lorgnette and the jeer ; and laughing straight in his face I jumped down the three steps of the veranda at one bound.

"A pleasant walk," muttered M. M., and went on his way.

Of course, I immediately joined Mme M. as soon as she indicated me to her husband, and looked as though she had invited me to do so an hour before, and as though I had been

accompanying her on her walks every morning for the last month. But I could not make out why she was so confused, so embarrassed, and what was in her mind when she brought herself to have recourse to her little lie? Why had she not simply said that she was going alone? I did not know how to look at her, but overwhelmed with wonder I began by degrees very naïvely peeping into her face; but just as an hour before at the rehearsal she did not notice either my looks or my mute question. The same anxiety, only more intense and more distinct, was apparent in her face, in her agitation, in her walk. She was in haste, and walked more and more quickly and kept looking uneasily down every avenue, down every path in the wood that led in the direction of the garden. And I, too, was expecting something. Suddenly there was the sound of horses' hoofs behind us. It was the whole party of ladies and gentlemen on horseback escorting N., the gentleman who was so suddenly deserting us.

Among the ladies was my fair tormentor, of whom M. M. had told us that she was in tears. But characteristically she was laughing like a child, and was galloping briskly on a splendid bay horse. On reaching us N. took off his hat, but did not stop, nor say one word to Mme M. Soon all the cavalcade disappeared from our sight. I glanced at Mme M. and almost cried out in wonder; she was standing as white as a handkerchief and big tears were gushing from her eyes. By chance our eyes met: Mme M. suddenly flushed and turned away for an instant, and a distinct look of uneasiness and vexation flitted across her face. I was in the way, worse even than last time, that was clearer than day, but how was I to get away?

And, as though guessing my difficulty, Mme M. opened the book which she had in her hand, and colouring and evidently trying not to look at me, she said, as though she had only suddenly realized it—

"Ah! It is the second part. I've made a mistake; please bring me the first.

I could not but understand. My part was over, and I could not have been more directly dismissed.

I ran off with her book and did not come back. The first part lay undisturbed on the table that morning. . . .

But I was not myself; in my heart there was a sort of haunting terror. I did my utmost not to meet Mme M. But I looked with wild curiosity at the self-satisfied person of M. M., as

though there must be something special about him now. I don't understand what was the meaning of my absurd curiosity. I only remember that I was strangely perplexed by all that I had chanced to see that morning. But the day was only just beginning and it was fruitful in events for me.

Dinner was very early. An expedition to a neighbouring hamlet to see a village festival that was taking place there had been fixed for the evening, and so it was necessary to be in time to get ready. I had been dreaming for the last three days of this excursion, anticipating all sorts of delights. Almost all the company gathered together on the veranda for coffee. I cautiously followed the others and concealed myself behind the third row of chairs. I was attracted by curiosity, and yet I was very anxious not to be seen by Mme M. But as luck would have it I was not far from my fair tormentor. Something miraculous and incredible was happening to her that day ; she looked twice as handsome. I don't know how and why this happens, but such miracles are by no means rare with women. There was with us at this moment a new guest, a tall, pale-faced young man, the official admirer of our fair beauty, who had just arrived from Moscow as though on purpose to replace N., of whom rumour said that he was desperately in love with the same lady. As for the newly arrived guest, he had for a long time past been on the same terms as Benedick with Beatrice in Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*. In short, the fair beauty was in her very best form that day. Her chatter and her jests were so full of grace, so trustfully naïve, so innocently careless, she was persuaded of the general enthusiasm with such graceful self-confidence that she really was all the time the centre of peculiar adoration. A throng of surprised and admiring listeners was continually round her, and she had never been so fascinating. Every word she uttered was marvellous and seductive, was caught up and handed round in the circle, and not one word, one jest, one sally was lost. I fancy no one had expected from her such taste, such brilliance, such wit. Her best qualities were, as a rule, buried under the most harum-scarum wilfulness, the most schoolboyish pranks, almost verging on buffoonery ; they were rarely noticed, and, when they were, were hardly believed in, so that now her extraordinary brilliancy was accompanied by an eager whisper of amazement among all. There was, however, one peculiar and rather delicate circumstance,

judging at least by the part in it played by Mme M.'s husband, which contributed to her success. The madcap ventured—and I must add to the satisfaction of almost everyone or, at any rate, to the satisfaction of all the young people—to make a furious attack upon him, owing to many causes, probably of great consequence in her eyes. She carried on with him a regular cross-fire of witticisms, of mocking and sarcastic sallies, of that most illusive and treacherous kind that, smoothly wrapped up on the surface, hit the mark without giving the victim anything to lay hold of, and exhaust him in fruitless efforts to repel the attack, reducing him to fury and comic despair.

I don't know for certain, but I fancy the whole proceeding was not improvised but premeditated. This desperate duel had begun earlier, at dinner. I call it desperate because M. M. was not quick to surrender. He had to call upon all his presence of mind, all his sharp wit and rare resourcefulness not to be completely covered with ignominy. The conflict was accompanied by the continual and irrepressible laughter of all who witnessed and took part in it. That day was for him very different from the day before. It was noticeable that Mme M. several times did her utmost to stop her indiscreet friend, who was certainly trying to depict the jealous husband in the most grotesque and absurd guise, in the guise of "a Bluebeard" it must be supposed, judging from all probabilities, from what has remained in my memory and finally from the part which I myself was destined to play in the affair.

I was drawn into it in a most absurd manner, quite unexpectedly. And as ill-luck would have it at that moment I was standing where I could be seen, suspecting no evil and actually forgetting the precautions I had so long practised. Suddenly I was brought into the foreground as a sworn foe and natural rival of M. M., as desperately in love with his wife, of which my persecutrix vowed and swore that she had proofs, saying that only that morning she had seen in the copse . . .

But before she had time to finish I broke in at the most desperate minute. That minute was so diabolically calculated, was so treacherously prepared to lead up to its finale, its ludicrous *dénouement*, and was brought out with such killing humour that a perfect outburst of irrepressible mirth saluted this last sally. And though even at the time I guessed that mine was not the most unpleasant part in the performance,

yet I was so confused, so irritated and alarmed that, full of misery and despair, gasping with shame and tears, I dashed through two rows of chairs, stepped forward, and addressing my tormentor, cried, in a voice broken with tears and indignation :

“ Aren’t you ashamed . . . aloud . . . before all the ladies . . . to tell such a wicked . . . lie ? . . . Like a small child . . . before all these men. . . . What will they say ? . . . A big girl like you . . . and married ! . . . ”

But I could not go on, there was a deafening roar of applause. My outburst created a perfect furore. My naïve gesture, my tears, and especially the fact that I seemed to be defending M. M., all this provoked such fiendish laughter, that even now I cannot help laughing at the mere recollection of it. I was overcome with confusion, senseless with horror and, burning with shame, hiding my face in my hands rushed away, knocked a tray out of the hands of a footman who was coming in at the door, and flew upstairs to my own room. I pulled out the key, which was on the outside of the door, and locked myself in. I did well, for there was a hue and cry after me. Before a minute had passed my door was besieged by a mob of the prettiest ladies. I heard their ringing laughter, their incessant chatter, their trilling voices ; they were all twittering at once, like swallows. All of them, every one of them, begged and besought me to open the door, if only for a moment ; swore that no harm should come to me, only that they wanted to smother me with kisses. But . . . what could be more horrible than this novel threat ? I simply burned with shame the other side of the door, hiding my face in the pillows and did not open, did not even respond. The ladies kept up their knocking for a long time, but I was deaf and obdurate as only a boy of eleven could be.

But what could I do now ? Everything was laid bare, everything had been exposed, everything I had so jealously guarded and concealed ! . . . Everlasting disgrace and shame had fallen on me ! But it is true that I could not myself have said why I was frightened and what I wanted to hide ; yet I was frightened of something and had trembled like a leaf at the thought of *that something's* being discovered. Only till that minute I had not known what it was : whether it was good or bad, splendid or shameful, praiseworthy or reprehensible ? Now in my distress, in the misery that had been forced upon me, I learned that it

was *absurd* and *shameful*. Instinctively I felt at the same time that this verdict was false, inhuman, and coarse; but I was crushed, annihilated; consciousness seemed checked in me and thrown into confusion; I could not stand up against that verdict, nor criticize it properly. I was befogged; I only felt that my heart had been inhumanly and shamelessly wounded, and was brimming over with impotent tears. I was irritated; but I was boiling with indignation and hate such as I had never felt before, for it was the first time in my life that I had known real sorrow, insult, and injury—and it was truly that, without any exaggeration. The first untried, unformed feeling had been so coarsely handled in me, a child. The first fragrant, virginal modesty had been so soon exposed and insulted, and the first and perhaps very real and æsthetic impression had been so outraged. Of course there was much my persecutors did not know and did not divine in my sufferings. One circumstance, which I had not succeeded in analysing till then, of which I had been as it were afraid, partly entered into it. I went on lying on my bed in despair and misery, hiding my face in my pillow, and I was alternately feverish and shivery. I was tormented by two questions: first, what had the wretched fair beauty seen, and, in fact, what could she have seen that morning in the copse between Mme M. and me? And secondly, how could I now look Mme M. in the face without dying on the spot of shame and despair?

An extraordinary noise in the yard roused me at last from the state of semi-consciousness into which I had fallen. I got up and went to the window. The whole yard was packed with carriages, saddle-horses, and bustling servants. It seemed that they were all setting off; some of the gentlemen had already mounted their horses, others were taking their places in the carriages. . . . Then I remembered the expedition to the village fête, and little by little an uneasiness came over me; I began anxiously looking for my pony in the yard; but there was no pony there, so they must have forgotten me. I could not restrain myself, and rushed headlong downstairs, thinking no more of unpleasant meetings or my recent ignominy. . . .

Terrible news awaited me. There was neither a horse nor seat in any of the carriages to spare for me; everything had been arranged, all the seats were taken, and I was forced to give place to others. Overwhelmed by this fresh blow, I stood on the steps and looked mournfully at the long rows of coaches,

carriages, and chaises, in which there was not the tiniest corner left for me, and at the smartly dressed ladies, whose horses were restlessly curvetting.

One of the gentlemen was late. They were only waiting for his arrival to set off. His horse was standing at the door, champing the bit, pawing the earth with his hoofs, and at every moment starting and rearing. Two stable-boys were carefully holding him by the bridle, and everyone else apprehensively stood at a respectful distance from him.

A most vexatious circumstance had occurred, which prevented my going. In addition to the fact that new visitors had arrived, filling up all the seats, two of the horses had fallen ill, one of them being my pony. But I was not the only person to suffer : it appeared that there was no horse for our new visitor, the pale-faced young man of whom I have spoken already. To get over this difficulty our host had been obliged to have recourse to the extreme step of offering his fiery unbroken stallion, adding, to satisfy his conscience, that it was impossible to ride him, and that they had long intended to sell the beast for its vicious character, if only a purchaser could be found.

But, in spite of his warning, the visitor declared that he was a good horseman, and in any case ready to mount anything rather than not go. Our host said no more, but now I fancied that a sly and ambiguous smile was straying on his lips. He waited for the gentleman who had spoken so well of his own horsemanship, and stood, without mounting his horse, impatiently rubbing his hands and continually glancing towards the door ; some similar feeling seemed shared by the two stable-boys, who were holding the stallion, almost breathless with pride at seeing themselves before the whole company in charge of a horse which might any minute kill a man for no reason whatever. Something akin to their master's sly smile gleamed, too, in their eyes, which were round with expectation, and fixed upon the door from which the bold visitor was to appear. The horse himself, too, behaved as though he were in league with our host and the stable-boys. He bore himself proudly and haughtily, as though he felt that he were being watched by several dozen curious eyes and were glorying in his evil reputation exactly as some incorrigible rogue might glory in his criminal exploits. He seemed to be defying the bold man who would venture to curb his independence.

That bold man did at last make his appearance. Conscience-



stricken at having kept everyone waiting, hurriedly drawing on his gloves, he came forward without looking at anything, ran down the steps, and only raised his eyes as he stretched out his hand to seize the mane of the waiting horse. But he was at once disconcerted by his frantic rearing and a warning scream from the frightened spectators. The young man stepped back and looked in perplexity at the vicious horse, which was quivering all over, snorting with anger, and rolling his blood-shot eyes ferociously, continually rearing on his hind legs and flinging up his fore legs as though he meant to bolt into the air and carry the two stable-boys with him. For a minute the young man stood completely nonplussed; then, flushing slightly with some embarrassment, he raised his eyes and looked at the frightened ladies.

"A very fine horse!" he said, as though to himself, "and to my thinking it ought to be a great pleasure to ride him; but . . . but do you know, I think I won't go?" he concluded, turning to our host with the broad, good-natured smile which so suited his kind and clever face.

"Yet I consider you are an excellent horseman, I assure you," answered the owner of the unapproachable horse, delighted, and he warmly and even gratefully pressed the young man's hand, "just because from the first moment you saw the sort of brute you had to deal with," he added with dignity. "Would you believe me, though I have served twenty-three years in the hussars, yet I've had the pleasure of being laid on the ground three times, thanks to that beast, that is, as often as I mounted the useless animal. Tancred, my boy, there's no one here fit for you! Your rider, it seems, must be some Ilya Muromets, and he must be sitting quiet now in the village of Kapatcharovo, waiting for your teeth to fall out. Come, take him away, he has frightened people enough. It was waste of time to bring him out," he cried, rubbing his hands complacently.

It must be observed that Tancred was no sort of use to his master and simply ate corn for nothing; moreover, the old hussar had lost his reputation for a knowledge of horseflesh by paying a fabulous sum for the worthless beast, which he had purchased only for his beauty . . . yet he was delighted now that Tancred had kept up his reputation, had disposed of another rider, and so had drawn closer on himself fresh senseless laurels.

"So you are not going?" cried the blonde beauty, who was particularly anxious that her *cavalieré servente* should be in attendance on this occasion. "Surely you are not frightened?"

"Upon my word I am," answered the young man.

"Are you in earnest?"

"Why, do you want me to break my neck?"

"Then make haste and get on my horse; don't be afraid, it is very quiet. We won't delay them, they can change the saddles in a minute! I'll try to take yours. Surely Tancred can't always be so unruly."

No sooner said than done, the madcap leaped out of the saddle and was standing before us as she finished the last sentence.

"You don't know Tancred, if you think he will allow your wretched side-saddle to be put on him! Besides, I would not let you break your neck, it would be a pity!" said our host, at that moment of inward gratification affecting, as his habit was, a studied brusqueness and even coarseness of speech which he thought in keeping with a jolly good fellow and an old soldier, and which he imagined to be particularly attractive to the ladies. This was one of his favourite fancies, his favourite whim, with which we were all familiar.

"Well, cry-baby, wouldn't you like to have a try? You wanted so much to go?" said the valiant horsewoman, noticing me and pointing tauntingly at Tancred, because I had been so imprudent as to catch her eye, and she would not let me go without a biting word, that she might not have dismounted from her horse absolutely for nothing.

"I expect you are not such a—— We all know you are a hero and would be ashamed to be afraid; especially when you will be looked at, you fine page," she added, with a fleeting glance at Mme M., whose carriage was the nearest to the entrance.

A rush of hatred and vengeance had flooded my heart, when the fair Amazon had approached us with the intention of mounting Tancred. . . . But I cannot describe what I felt at this unexpected challenge from the madcap. Everything was dark before my eyes when I saw her glance at Mme M. For an instant an idea flashed through my mind . . . but it was only a moment, less than a moment, like a flash of gunpowder; perhaps it was the last straw, and I suddenly now was moved to rage as my spirit rose, so that I longed to put all my enemies

to utter confusion, and to revenge myself on all of them and before everyone, by showing the sort of person I was. Or whether by some miracle, some prompting from medieval history, of which I had known nothing till then, sent whirling through my giddy brain, images of tournaments, paladins, heroes, lovely ladies, the clash of swords, shouts and the applause of the crowd, and amidst those shouts the timid cry of a frightened heart, which moved the proud soul more sweetly than victory and fame—I don't know whether all this romantic nonsense was in my head at the time, or whether, more likely, only the first dawning of the inevitable nonsense that was in store for me in the future, anyway, I felt that my hour had come. My heart leaped and shuddered, and I don't remember how, at one bound, I was down the steps and beside Tancred.

"You think I am afraid?" I cried, boldly and proudly, in such a fever that I could hardly see, breathless with excitement, and flushing till the tears scalded my cheeks. "Well, you shall see!" And clutching at Tancred's mane I put my foot in the stirrup before they had time to make a movement to stop me; but at that instant Tancred reared, jerked his head, and with a mighty bound forward wrenched himself out of the hands of the petrified stable-boys, and dashed off like a hurricane, while everyone cried out in horror.

Goodness knows how I got my other leg over the horse while it was in full gallop; I can't imagine, either, how I did not lose hold of the reins. Tancred bore me beyond the trellis gate, turned sharply to the right and flew along beside the fence regardless of the road. Only at that moment I heard behind me a shout from fifty voices, and that shout was echoed in my swooning heart with such a feeling of pride and pleasure that I shall never forget that mad moment of my boyhood. All the blood rushed to my head, bewildering me and overpowering my fears. I was beside myself. There certainly was, as I remember it now, something of the knight-errant about the exploit.

My knightly exploits, however, were all over in an instant or it would have gone badly with the knight. And, indeed, I do not know how I escaped as it was. I did know how to ride, I had been taught. But my pony was more like a sheep than a riding horse. No doubt I should have been thrown off Tancred if he had had time to throw me, but after galloping fifty paces

he suddenly took fright at a huge stone which lay across the road and bolted back. He turned sharply, galloping at full speed, so that it is a puzzle to me even now that I was not sent spinning out of the saddle and flying like a ball for twenty feet, that I was not dashed to pieces, and that Tancred did not dislocate his leg by such a sudden turn. He rushed back to the gate, tossing his head furiously, bounding from side to side as though drunk with rage, flinging his legs at random in the air, and at every leap trying to shake me off his back as though a tiger had leaped on him and were thrusting its teeth and claws into his back.

In another instant I should have flown off; I was falling; but several gentlemen flew to my rescue. Two of them intercepted the way into the open country, two others galloped up, closing in upon Tancred so that their horses' sides almost crushed my legs, and both of them caught him by the bridle. A few seconds later we were back at the steps.

They lifted me down from the horse, pale and scarcely breathing. I was shaking like a blade of grass in the wind; it was the same with Tancred, who was standing, his hoofs as it were thrust into the earth and his whole body thrown back, puffing his fiery breath from red and streaming nostrils, twitching and quivering all over, seeming overwhelmed with wounded pride and anger at a child's being so bold with impunity. All around me I heard cries of bewilderment, surprise and alarm.

At that moment my straying eyes caught those of Mme M., who looked pale and agitated, and—I can never forget that moment—in one instant my face was flooded with colour, glowed and burned like fire; I don't know what happened to me, but confused and frightened by my own feelings I timidly dropped my eyes to the ground. But my glance was noticed, it was caught, it was stolen from me. All eyes turned on Mme M., and finding herself unawares the centre of attention, she, too, flushed like a child from some naïve and involuntary feeling and made an unsuccessful effort to cover her confusion by laughing. . . .

All this, of course, was very absurd-looking from outside, but at that moment an extremely naïve and unexpected circumstance saved me from being laughed at by everyone, and gave a special colour to the whole adventure. The lovely persecutor who was the instigator of the whole escapade, and who till

then had been my irreconcilable foe, suddenly rushed up to embrace and kiss me. She had hardly been able to believe her eyes when she saw me dare to accept her challenge, and pick up the gauntlet she had flung at me by glancing at Mme M. She had almost died of terror and self-reproach when I had flown off on Tancred ; now, when it was all over, and particularly when she caught the glance at Mme M., my confusion and my sudden flush of colour, when the romantic strain in her frivolous little head had given a new secret, unspoken significance to the moment—she was moved to such enthusiasm over my “ knightliness,” that touched, joyful and proud of me, she rushed up and pressed me to her bosom. She lifted the most naïve, stern-looking little face, on which there quivered and gleamed two little crystal tears, and gazing at the crowd that thronged about her said in a grave, earnest voice, such as they had never heard her use before, pointing to me : “ Mais c’est très sérieux, messieurs, ne riez pas ! ” She did not notice that all were standing, as though fascinated, admiring her bright enthusiasm. Her swift, unexpected action, her earnest little face, the simple-hearted *naïveté*, the unexpected feeling betrayed by the tears that welled in her invariably laughter-loving eyes, were such a surprise that everyone stood before her as though electrified by her expression, her rapid, fiery words and gestures. It seemed as though no one could take his eyes off her for fear of missing that rare moment in her enthusiastic face. Even our host flushed crimson as a tulip, and people declared that they heard him confess afterwards that “ to his shame ” he had been in love for a whole minute with his charming guest. Well, of course, after this I was a knight, a hero.

“ De Lorge ! Toggenburg ! ” was heard in the crowd.

There was a sound of applause.

“ Hurrah for the rising generation ! ” added the host.

“ But he is coming with us, he certainly must come with us,” said the beauty ; “ we will find him a place, we must find him a place. He shall sit beside me, on my knee . . . but no, no ! That’s a mistake ! . . . ” she corrected herself, laughing, unable to restrain her mirth at our first encounter. But as she laughed she stroked my hand tenderly, doing all she could to soften me, that I might not be offended.

“ Of course, of course,” several voices chimed in ; “ he must go, he has won his place.”

The matter was settled in a trice. The same old maid who had brought about my acquaintance with the blonde beauty was at once besieged with entreaties from all the younger people to remain at home and let me have her seat. She was forced to consent, to her intense vexation, with a smile and a stealthy hiss of anger. Her protectress, who was her usual refuge, my former foe and new friend, called to her as she galloped off on her spirited horse, laughing like a child, that she envied her and would have been glad to stay at home herself, for it was just going to rain, and we should all get soaked.

And she was right in predicting rain. A regular downpour came on within an hour and the expedition was done for. We had to take shelter for some hours in the huts of the village, and had to return home between nine and ten in the evening in the damp mist that followed the rain. I began to be a little feverish. At the minute when I was starting, Mme M. came up to me and expressed surprise that my neck was uncovered and that I had nothing on over my jacket. I answered that I had not had time to get my coat. She took out a pin and pinned up the turned-down collar of my shirt, took off her own neck a crimson gauze kerchief, and put it round my neck that I might not get a sore throat. She did this so hurriedly that I had not time even to thank her.

But when we got home I found her in the little drawing-room with the blonde beauty and the pale-faced young man who had gained glory for horsemanship that day by refusing to ride Tancred. I went up to thank her and give back the scarf. But now, after all my adventures, I felt somehow ashamed. I wanted to make haste and get upstairs, there at my leisure to reflect and consider. I was brimming over with impressions. As I gave back the kerchief I blushed up to my ears, as usual.

"I bet he would like to keep the kerchief," said the young man laughing. "One can see that he is sorry to part with your scarf."

"That's it, that's it!" the fair lady put in. "What a boy! Oh!" she said, shaking her head with obvious vexation, but she stopped in time at a grave glance from Mme M., who did not want to carry the jest too far.

I made haste to get away.

"Well, you are a boy," said the madcap, overtaking me in the next room and affectionately taking me by both hands.

"Why, you should have simply not returned the kerchief if you wanted so much to have it. You should have said you put it down somewhere, and that would have been the end of it. What a simpleton! Couldn't even do that! What a funny boy!"

And she tapped me on the chin with her finger, laughing at my having flushed as red as a poppy.

"I am your friend now, you know; am I not? Our enmity is over, isn't it? Yes or no?"

I laughed and pressed her fingers without a word.

"Oh, why are you so . . . why are you so pale and shivering? Have you caught a chill?"

"Yes, I don't feel well."

"Ah, poor fellow! That's the result of over-excitement. Do you know what? You had better go to bed without sitting up for supper, and you will be all right in the morning. Come along."

She took me upstairs, and there was no end to the care she lavished on me. Leaving me to undress she ran downstairs, got me some tea, and brought it up herself when I was in bed. She brought me up a warm quilt as well. I was much impressed and touched by all the care and attention lavished on me; or perhaps I was affected by the whole day, the expedition and feverishness. As I said good night to her I hugged her warmly, as though she were my dearest and nearest friend, and in my exhausted state all the emotions of the day came back to me in a rush; I almost shed tears as I nestled to her bosom. She noticed my overwrought condition, and I believe my madcap herself was a little touched.

"You are a very good boy," she said, looking at me with gentle eyes, "please don't be angry with me. You won't, will you?"

In fact, we became the warmest and truest of friends.

It was rather early when I woke up, but the sun was already flooding the whole room with brilliant light. I jumped out of bed feeling perfectly well and strong, as though I had had no fever the day before; indeed, I felt now unutterably joyful. I recalled the previous day and felt that I would have given any happiness if I could at that minute have embraced my new friend, the fair-haired beauty, again, as I had the night before; but it was very early and everyone was still asleep. Hurriedly dressing, I went out into the garden and from there into the

copse. I made my way where the leaves were thickest, where the fragrance of the trees was more resinous, and where the sun peeped in most gaily, rejoicing that it could penetrate the dense darkness of the foliage. It was a lovely morning.

Going on farther and farther, before I was aware of it, I had reached the farther end of the copse and came out on the river Moskva. It flowed at the bottom of the hill two hundred paces below. On the opposite bank of the river they were mowing. I watched whole rows of sharp scythes gleam all together in the sunlight at every swing of the mower and then vanish again like little fiery snakes going into hiding; I watched the cut grass flying on one side in dense rich swathes and being laid in long straight lines. I don't know how long I spent in contemplation. At last I was roused from my reverie by hearing a horse snorting and impatiently pawing the ground twenty paces from me, in the track which ran from the high road to the manor house. I don't know whether I heard this horse as soon as the rider rode up and stopped there, or whether the sound had long been in my ears without rousing me from my dreaming. Moved by curiosity I went into the copse, and before I had gone many steps I caught the sound of voices speaking rapidly, though in subdued tones. I went up closer, carefully parting the branches of the bushes that edged the path, and at once sprang back in amazement. I caught a glimpse of a familiar white dress and a soft feminine voice resounded like music in my heart. It was Mme M. She was standing beside a man on horseback who, stooping down from the saddle, was hurriedly talking to her, and to my amazement I recognized him as N., the young man who had gone away the morning before and over whose departure M. M. had been so busy. But people had said at the time that he was going far away to somewhere in the South of Russia, and so I was very much surprised at seeing him with us again so early, and alone with Mme M.

She was moved and agitated as I had never seen her before, and tears were glistening on her cheeks. The young man was holding her hand and stooping down to kiss it. I had come upon them at the moment of parting. They seemed to be in haste. At last he took out of his pocket a sealed envelope, gave it to Mme M., put one arm round her, still not dismounting, and gave her a long, fervent kiss. A minute later he lashed his horse and flew past me like an arrow. Mme M.



looked after him for some moments, then pensively and disconsolately turned homewards. But after going a few steps along the track she seemed suddenly to recollect herself, hurriedly parted the bushes and walked on through the copse.

I followed her, surprised and perplexed by all that I had seen. My heart was beating violently, as though from terror. I was, as it were, benumbed and befogged; my ideas were shattered and turned upside down; but I remember I was, for some reason, very sad. I got glimpses from time to time through the green foliage of her white dress before me: I followed her mechanically, never losing sight of her, though I trembled at the thought that she might notice me. At last she came out on the little path that led to the house. After waiting half a minute I, too, emerged from the bushes; but what was my amazement when I saw lying on the red sand of the path a sealed packet, which I recognized, from the first glance, as the one that had been given to Mme M. ten minutes before.

I picked it up. On both sides the paper was blank, there was no address on it. The envelope was not large, but it was fat and heavy, as though there were three or more sheets of notepaper in it.

What was the meaning of this envelope? No doubt it would explain the whole mystery. Perhaps in it there was said all that N. had scarcely hoped to express in their brief, hurried interview. He had not even dismounted. . . . Whether he had been in haste or whether he had been afraid of being false to himself at the hour of parting—God only knows. . . .

I stopped, without coming out on the path, threw the envelope in the most conspicuous place on it, and kept my eyes upon it, supposing that Mme M. would notice the loss and come back and look for it. But after waiting four minutes I could stand it no longer, I picked up my find again, put it in my pocket, and set off to overtake Mme M. I came upon her in the big avenue in the garden. She was walking straight towards the house with a swift and hurried step, though she was lost in thought, and her eyes were on the ground. I did not know what to do. Go up to her, give it her? That would be as good as saying that I knew everything, that I had seen it all. I should betray myself at the first word. And how should I look at her? How would she look at me. I kept expecting that she would discover her loss and return on her tracks. Then

I could, unnoticed, have flung the envelope on the path and she would have found it. But no ! We were approaching the house ; she had already been noticed. . . .

As ill-luck would have it everyone had got up very early that day, because, after the unsuccessful expedition of the evening before, they had arranged something new, of which I had heard nothing. All were preparing to set off, and were having breakfast in the veranda. I waited for ten minutes, that I might not be seen with Mme M., and making a circuit of the garden approached the house from the other side a long time after her. She was walking up and down the veranda with her arms folded, looking pale and agitated, and was obviously trying her utmost to suppress the agonizing, despairing misery which could be plainly discerned in her eyes, her walk, her every movement. Sometimes she went down the veranda steps and walked a few paces among the flower-beds in the direction of the garden ; her eyes were impatiently, greedily, even incautiously, seeking something on the sand of the path and on the floor of the veranda. There could be no doubt she had discovered her loss and imagined she had dropped the letter somewhere here, near the house—yes, that must be so, she was convinced of it.

Someone noticed that she was pale and agitated, and others made the same remark. She was besieged with questions about her health and condolences. She had to laugh, to jest, to appear lively. From time to time she looked at her husband, who was standing at the end of the terrace talking to two ladies, and the poor woman was overcome by the same shudder, the same embarrassment, as on the day of his first arrival. Thrusting my hand into my pocket and holding the letter tight in it, I stood at a little distance from them all, praying to fate that Mme M. should notice me. I longed to cheer her up, to relieve her anxiety if only by a glance ; to say a word to her on the sly. But when she did chance to look at me I dropped my eyes.

I saw her distress and I was not mistaken. To this day I don't know her secret. I know nothing but what I saw, and what I have just described. The intrigue was not such, perhaps, as one might suppose at the first glance. Perhaps that kiss was the kiss of farewell, perhaps it was the last slight reward for the sacrifice made to her peace and honour. N. was going away, he was leaving her, perhaps for ever. Even that letter I was holding in my hand—who can tell what it contained ! How can one

judge? And who can condemn? And yet there is no doubt that the sudden discovery of her secret would have been terrible—it would have been a fatal blow for her. I still remember her face at that minute, it could not have shown more suffering. To feel, to know, to be convinced, to expect, as though it were one's execution, that in a quarter of an hour, in a minute perhaps, all might be discovered, the letter might be found by someone, picked up; there was no address on it, it might be opened, and then . . . What then? What torture could be worse than what was awaiting her? She moved about among those who would be her judges. In another minute their smiling flattering faces would be menacing and merciless. She would read mockery, malice and icy contempt on those faces, and then her life would be plunged in everlasting darkness, with no dawn to follow. . . . Yes, I did not understand it then as I understand it now. I could only have vague suspicions and misgivings, and a heartache at the thought of her danger, which I could not fully understand. But whatever lay hidden in her secret, much was expiated, if expiation were needed, by those moments of anguish of which I was witness and which I shall never forget.

But then came a cheerful summons to set off; immediately everyone was bustling about gaily; laughter and lively chatter were heard on all sides. Within two minutes the veranda was deserted. Mme M. declined to join the party, acknowledging at last that she was not well. But, thank God, all the others set off, everyone was in haste, and there was no time to worry her with commiseration, inquiries, and advice. A few remained at home. Her husband said a few words to her; she answered that she would be all right directly, that he need not be uneasy, that there was no occasion for her to lie down, that she would go into the garden, alone . . . with me . . . here she glanced at me. Nothing could be more fortunate! I flushed with pleasure, with delight; a minute later we were on the way.

She walked along the same avenues and paths by which she had returned from the copse, instinctively remembering the way she had come, gazing before her with her eyes fixed on the ground, looking about intently without answering me, possibly forgetting that I was walking beside her.

But when we had already reached the place where I had picked up the letter, and the path ended, Mme M. suddenly stopped, and in a voice faint and weak with misery said that she

felt worse, and that she would go home. But when she reached the garden fence she stopped again and thought a minute ; a smile of despair came on her lips, and utterly worn out and exhausted, resigned, and making up her mind to the worst, she turned without a word and retraced her steps, even forgetting to tell me of her intention.

My heart was torn with sympathy, and I did not know what to do.

We went, or rather I led her, to the place from which an hour before I had heard the tramp of a horse and their conversation. Here, close to a shady elm tree, was a seat hewn out of one huge stone, about which grew ivy, wild jasmine, and dog-rose ; the whole wood was dotted with little bridges, arbours, grottoes, and similar surprises. Mme M. sat down on the bench and glanced unconsciously at the marvellous view that lay open before us. A minute later she opened her book, and fixed her eyes upon it without reading, without turning the pages, almost unconscious of what she was doing. It was about half-past nine. The sun was already high and was floating gloriously in the deep, dark blue sky, as though melting away in its own light. The mowers were by now far away ; they were scarcely visible from our side of the river ; endless ridges of mown grass crept after them in unbroken succession, and from time to time the faintly stirring breeze wafted their fragrance to us. The never-ceasing concert of those who " sow not, neither do they reap " and are free as the air they cleave with their sportive wings was all about us. It seemed as though at that moment every flower, every blade of grass was exhaling the aroma of sacrifice, was saying to its Creator, " Father, I am blessed and happy."

I glanced at the poor woman, who alone was like one dead amidst all this joyous life ; two big tears hung motionless on her lashes, wrung from her heart by bitter grief. It was in my power to relieve and console this poor, fainting heart, only I did not know how to approach the subject, how to take the first step. I was in agonies. A hundred times I was on the point of going up to her, but every time my face glowed like fire.

Suddenly a bright idea dawned upon me. I had found a way of doing it ; I revived.

" Would you like me to pick you a nosegay ? " I said, in such a joyful voice that Mme M. immediately raised her head and looked at me intently.

"Yes, do," she said at last in a weak voice, with a faint smile, at once dropping her eyes on the book again.

"Or soon they will be mowing the grass here and there will be no flowers," I cried, eagerly setting to work.

I had soon picked my nosegay, a poor, simple one. I should have been ashamed to take it indoors ; but how light my heart was as I picked the flowers and tied them up ! The dog-rose and the wild jasmine I picked closer to the seat. I knew that not far off there was a field of rye, not yet ripe. I ran there for cornflowers ; I mixed them with tall ears of rye, picking out the finest and most golden. Close by I came upon a perfect nest of forget-me-nots, and my nosegay was almost complete. Farther away in the meadow there were dark blue campanulas and wild pinks, and I ran down to the very edge of the river to get yellow water-lilies. At last, making my way back, and going for an instant into the wood to get some bright green fan-shaped leaves of the maple to put round the nosegay, I happened to come across a whole family of pansies, close to which, luckily for me, the fragrant scent of violets betrayed the little flower hiding in the thick lush grass and still glistening with drops of dew. The nosegay was complete. I bound it round with fine long grass which twisted into a rope, and I carefully lay the letter in the centre, hiding it with the flowers, but in such a way that it could be very easily noticed if the slightest attention were bestowed upon my nosegay.

I carried it to Mme M.

On the way it seemed to me that the letter was lying too much in view : I hid it a little more. As I got nearer I thrust it still farther in the flowers ; and finally, when I was on the spot, I suddenly poked it so deeply into the centre of the nosegay that it could not be noticed at all from outside. My cheeks were positively flaming. I wanted to hide my face in my hands and run away at once, but she glanced at my flowers as though she had completely forgotten that I had gathered them. Mechanically, almost without looking, she held out her hand and took my present ; but at once laid it on the seat as though I had handed it to her for that purpose and dropped her eyes to her book again, seeming lost in thought. I was ready to cry at this mischance. "If only my nosegay were close to her," I thought ; "if only she had not forgotten it !" I lay down on the grass not far off, put my right arm under my head, and

closed my eyes as though I were overcome by drowsiness. But I waited, keeping my eyes fixed on her.

Ten minutes passed, it seemed to me that she was getting paler and paler . . . fortunately a blessed chance came to my aid.

This was a big, golden bee, brought by a kindly breeze, luckily for me. It first buzzed over my head, and then flew up to Mme M. She waved it off once or twice, but the bee grew more and more persistent. At last Mme M. snatched up my nosegay and waved it before her face. At that instant the letter dropped out from among the flowers and fell straight upon the open book. I started. For some time Mme M., mute with amazement, stared first at the letter and then at the flowers which she was holding in her hands, and she seemed unable to believe her eyes. All at once she flushed, started, and glanced at me. But I caught her movement and I shut my eyes tight, pretending to be asleep. Nothing would have induced me to look her straight in the face at that moment. My heart was throbbing and leaping like a bird in the grasp of some village boy. I don't remember how long I lay with my eyes shut, two or three minutes. At last I ventured to open them. Mme M. was greedily reading the letter, and from her glowing cheeks, her sparkling, tearful eyes, her bright face, every feature of which was quivering with joyful emotion, I guessed that there was happiness in the letter and all her misery was dispersed like smoke. An agonizing, sweet feeling gnawed at my heart, it was hard for me to go on pretending. . . .

I shall never forget that minute !

Suddenly, a long way off, we heard voices

"Mme M. ! Natalie ! Natalie !"

Mme M. did not answer, but she got up quickly from the seat, came up to me and bent over me. I felt that she was looking straight into my face. My eyelashes quivered, but I controlled myself and did not open my eyes. I tried to breathe more evenly and quietly, but my heart smothered me with its violent throbbing. Her burning breath scorched my cheeks ; she bent close down to my face as though trying to make sure. At last a kiss and tears fell on my hand, the one which was lying on my breast.

"Natalie ! Natalie ! where are you," we heard again, this time quite close.

"Coming," said Mme M., in her mellow, silvery voice,

which was so choked and quivering with tears and so subdued that no one but I could hear that, "Coming !"

But at that instant my heart at last betrayed me and seemed to send all my blood rushing to my face. At that instant a swift, burning kiss scalded my lips. I uttered a faint cry. I opened my eyes, but at once the same gauze kerchief fell upon them, as though she meant to screen me from the sun. An instant later she was gone. I heard nothing but the sound of rapidly retreating steps. I was alone. . . .

I pulled off her kerchief and kissed it, beside myself with rapture ; for some moments I was almost frantic. . . . Hardly able to breathe, leaning on my elbow on the grass, I stared unconsciously before me at the surrounding slopes, streaked with cornfields, at the river that flowed twisting and winding far away, as far as the eye could see, between fresh hills and villages that gleamed like dots all over the sunlit distance—at the dark blue, hardly visible forests, which seemed as though smoking at the edge of the burning sky, and a sweet stillness inspired by the triumphant peacefulness of the picture gradually brought calm to my troubled heart. I felt more at ease and breathed more freely, but my whole soul was full of a dumb, sweet yearning, as though a veil had been drawn from my eyes as though at a foretaste of something. My frightened heart, faintly quivering with expectation, was groping timidly and joyfully towards some conjecture . . . and all at once my bosom heaved, began aching as though something had pierced it, and tears, sweet tears, gushed from my eyes. I hid my face in my hands, and quivering like a blade of grass, gave myself up to the first consciousness and revelation of my heart, the first vague glimpse of my nature. My childhood was over from that moment.

When two hours later I returned home I did not find Mme M. Through some sudden chance she had gone back to Moscow with her husband. I never saw her again.

## BARONESS VON HUTTEN

*The Notorious Mrs. Gatacre*

The Baroness von Hutten is American by birth, and has written some of the most popular novels of the last few years, of which the best known, *Pam*, has sold over half a million copies. Her latest book, *The Mem*, was published a short time ago.





## THE NOTORIOUS MRS. GATACRE

**Y**OUNG Boosey was intensely and delightedly busy writing his *Life of Augustus Fenn*—his grandfather.

He had begun it a year ago last November—it was now May—and being a conscientious youth equipped, as is not always the case with conscientious youth, with a keen critical faculty, he had made careful and selective use of the time and opportunities at his disposal, and the book had grown slowly and evenly, as good things should grow.

That morning in May, as he waited for the 'bus in St. John's Wood, he was thinking with sober delight of the goodness of his work, and of the reward he was planning to bestow upon himself for good work honourably done, when the queer adventure began.

It was a windy, sunny morning, with huge, billowy white clouds hanging in apparent looseness from the sky—jolly, scudding shadows in the streets that were clean from an early-morning shower; and from the mysterious-seeming gardens behind the grimy walls came gusts of lilac-scent and bird-song.

"If Ladd can get off next week," Rex Boosey thought, holding his hat on to his head, and gazing contentedly round the world, "we could go Saturday week. Much better than later when the Broads are thick with boats——"

And then to his dismay he saw the not-so-much-fat-as-swollen-looking Mr. Cuthbertson being blown towards him by a malignant wind.

Mr. Cuthbertson's greenish and shabby frock-coat was blown tight to his back, and fluttered round his short legs as he leaned against it, protesting audibly against Æolus's pranks. "Now, now, now, what a wind—'morning, Boosey—I shall be blown away over the roofs in a minute—Waiting for a 'bus?" Boosey felt an exasperated wish to reply to the platitudinous old ass that he was waiting for a rhinoceros to bear him to the British Museum, but he was one of those young men whose manners speak for their mothers, so he nicely conceded that he *was* waiting for a 'bus.

"Windy, isn't it?" went on the old man with all the blandness of the unself-suspected bore. "Street's wettish, too, so it must have rained. How's your mother?"

"She's very well, thanks, sir." After a minute the kind youth, unconscious of the blow his gods were about to administer to him through the swollen old man with the frowzy beard: "How is Mrs. Cuthbertson?"

Now as a rule the most casual inquiry about Mrs. Cuthbertson—who was an invalid—drew from her husband a flood of confused and devastating eloquence about her heart, her stomach and even her kidneys, all of which were obscurely afflicted, but to-day he merely nodded, and returning solemnly:

"Not at all what she should be, I fear," adding in a more lively voice, while his globular and blood-shot eyes shone with a new light: "What's all this I hear about you writin' a book, my boy? Gus Fenn's Life, I'm told. Is it true?"

"Yes, sir. I've been working on it for nearly eighteen months, and it will be done next week."

Rex was pleased to have his book inquired for, and, after all, the old man *had* been someone, in his day, and he had certainly known the great painter.

"H'm! I wish," Cuthbertson said as the 'bus appeared like a scarlet galleon in the shining distance, "that you'd told me before. You see," he added, with an important gesture of his large, rather dirty hands, "I have a lot of letters of his—letters written in '76—in '76, mind you!"

"Oh, have you, sir?" The young man's spectacles shone blandly in the sun, but there was no fire in his voice. "I've got to the last ten years now, as a matter of fact. '76, of course, was the Briseis' year—well, I must be off—good morning, sir." But Cuthbertson caught his arm. "No, no, wait for the next one, Rex. I see that you don't *know*—and your book would be Hamlet without the Prince without *her* in it——"

The 'bus rolled past. "Her? I really should have taken that 'bus, sir . . ."

"There are plenty of 'buses, but there is only one Maggie Gatacre," broke in the old man. "Come on, walk back with me ~~to~~ Rowland Road, and I'll show you the letters—there are two from her herself, too."

He bore the unwilling biographer with him, but not without protest. "I know all about Mrs. Gatacre," Rex

protested. "*Naturally*, I do, and I have already noted it, and I trust with delicacy——"

The old man gave him a shove that nearly knocked him down, and burst into a bellow of unmelodious mirth. "With delicacy! Maggie Gatacre 'with delicacy'! Maggie, who was co-respondent! I hope your grandfather's 'shade' is sitting on that wall listening to you. Yes," he added, with a quick, backward glance at the number of the shabby gate they had just passed, "on that very wall, you absurd young prig, for another thing you don't know is, that it's there at 151 Wishart Road that she lived, 'the notorious Mrs. Gatacre,' as they used to call her!"

Another of "his" buses rumbled past at that moment, but Rex Boosey made no effort to board it. Behind his glasses gleamed the sudden flame of the born biographer on the track of an authentic story.

It was obvious to him that this semi-disreputable old man, whom he had vaguely known to have been a friend of his famous grandfather, but to whom it had, in his young arrogance, never occurred to him to go for matter for his book, was indeed in possession of confirmable and interesting information regarding the famous Victorian.

"She lived—in that house?"

"She did. Come along, I'll show you the letters. A pity you didn't tell me about your book—nobody ever tells me anything—for I happen to have been mixed up with the divorce business, and Maggie and I were great friends . . . oh, nothing of *that* kind," he protested in answer to some quite imaginary twinkle in Boosey's eye, "just friends. What's more," he added, as they reached his house, and he fumbled in his spotty waistcoat for his latchkey, "I was about the only one who ever knew Gatacre at all well. Come in, my dear young friend, come in."

The passage was narrow and dark, and smelt of damp linoleum, cabbage and carbolic.

A stuffed sea-bird hung just inside the dining-room door, and as the door opened it bobbed about in a dismal caricature of hovering, and on the worn brown and green tapestry tablecloth still stood the sad remains of a messy breakfast.

"Take a pew," said Mr. Cuthbertson. "I use this room as my own den—do my work here, and so on, as my poor wife never comes downstairs."

There stood against the wall opposite the door a narrow piece of furniture that seemed a hybrid between a writing-table and a bookcase. A narrow writing-shelf projected from its middle, and above were tall doors, with green silk curtains showing behind the dusty glass.

These doors Mr. Cuthbertson opened and threw wide, showing ten rows of brass-knobbed drawers. After a prolonged fumbling in various of the drawers, he returned to the table, near which Boosey obediently sat, and slapped down on the crumby surface near his greasy plate, a bundle of letters he'd together by a red rubber band.

"Here they are, you see, written in dear old Gus's own hand," he proceeded with his unconquerable need for unnecessary elucidation, "one—two—three—*eight* of 'em, my boy, and every single one of 'em about her. Let's see—the first is written 13th April, 1874, a week or so after he met her at a party of Lunmy Gascoyne's at Richmond. 'Dear Cuth'—he always called me Cuth, Gus did—'I want you to do me a favour if you will. Mrs. Gatacre has agreed to sit to me, but I don't want to have her come to my place, so will you lend me your studio for six weeks? Of course, I mean will you *let* it to me?'"

In the fusty room the old man's fruity voice read on, the young one listening with interest, and then with increasing discomfort, and finally with horror.

"Oh, please stop, sir," he cried in an agony of shyness and embarrassment. "I—I oughtn't to be hearing this."

Old Cuthbertson glanced at him in bewilderment. "What—what the deuce d'you *mean*?" he cried angrily. "What's the *matter* with you?"

"I—I'm sorry if I was rude," Rex answered, taking up his hat—his hat chosen so carefully to suit his joy as a serious literary man with no leanings towards fiction—"but I do feel that letters as private as these ought not to be read by—by any third person."

"But damme, sir, you're a fool! You're writing his life, aren't you? And haven't you the pluck to see that this *was* his life? Augustus Fenn *loved* Maggie Gatacre. Loved her, I tell you, as you pink-blooded brats of to-day have no conception of!"

"I—I dare say, sir. I dare say, but—" The young man stuck to his guns.

"I, of course, knew that my grandfather had a—a liaison with Mrs. Gatacre, and I have done my best to treat it justly, but my grandfather——"

"Oh, damnation," wailed the old man. "Oh, damnation. The minute you undertook to write Augustus Fenn's life you should have ceased to be his grandson. A grandson can't *be* a biographer, dammit!"

"I think you are wrong, sir. I had access to papers I could never have seen had I *not* been his grandson. I hope," the young man added with a quick smile that relieved his rather solemn face, "that when you read the book you may not think quite so badly of grandsons."

On this note they parted, but Boosey did not go to the British Museum, where he had meant to do some last bit of investigation about his grandfather's never-quite-conferred knighthood. Instead of this he walked for two or three hours along the comparatively quiet streets of St. John's Wood, thinking, planning, rejecting, and above all wondering.

How Augustus Fenn could ever so have trusted an old wind-bag like Cuthbertson, he kept saying to himself, he could not understand. The world's worst bore, old Cuthbertson; a dirty, swollen, boastful old bore. Yet it was to Cuthbertson that Fen had written those remarkable, passion-swept, desperate letters!

"If he hadn't," the puzzled young man's reflections went on, "been mother's father, I'd have been able to make splendid use of the letters. They *were* beautiful letters, too. Yet mother said—and so did Garrett—that Mrs. Gatacre was simply a disreputable woman! White ponies in a basket carriage, in the park, *that* sort of thing. And the divorce, of course, was hard enough for me to manage so as not to hurt mother and the aunts. Grandmother was absolutely right to divorce him, but then—divorce in 1878! And the Queen in such a horrible wax!"

It was at this point that the god of adventure caused him to stop at an open garden door beyond which confusion reigned. Two ladies, one middle-aged, and one very young and with gleaming red hair, stood at the foot of a tall and beautiful birch tree, hands extended, eyes uplifted to where, amongst the delicately stirring, lacquered leaves, had settled a plethoric-looking green and grey parrot.

"Gussie," the ladies implored, as if the bird were some

inexorable god on whose placating they were professionally bent. "Gussie, be good, be good——"

Very priestess-like in particular, young Boosey thought, the red-headed girl looked in her white frock.

"Gussie, *dear* old boy," she coaxed, while the cynical bird gave a short and sneering laugh. "It's no good, Emily," the elderly lady said, "he's just a *devil*."

"Devil," remarked the bird confirmatively, and another voice so like the bird's that Mr. Boosey, that innocent eaves-dropper, gave a genuine start, repeated the word. "Devil," said this voice, "that's just what he is, Violet. And I've told you already that he'll never come down. Someone will have to climb up and *bring* him!"

"But Mrs. Roby. Grandmamma," Emily answered the invisible owner of the parrot-voice, "has broken a toe, and I let Roby go home."

"Well, then," retorted the voice unamiably, "can't *you* climb a ladder, Emily Robinson? I could have done it twenty years ago—or even ten—and I'm eighty-six!"

And suddenly Rex Boosey realized that his uncharted wanderings had led him back to 151 Wishart Road, where dwelt the lady with whom his thoughts had been so occupied—the notorious Mrs. Gatacre; and at the same time he knew that that parrot-voice from behind the clump of Persian lilacs was the voice that in other days, in its youthful music, had been an enchantment to his grandfather's ears.

"I—will you let me," he asked, as, with the suddenness of the shy, he stepped out into the sunshine, "let me shin up—I mean climb up and get the parrot?"

The ladies looked gravely at him. "It's very kind of you," Mrs. Robinson said at length. "My mother *is* very worried about her—the parrot, I mean—but you'd better take the ladder there—against the wall . . ."

And young Mr. Boosey fetched the ladder, leant it against the silky, ivory trunk of the birch-tree and solemnly mounting it, brought down the ancient bird which, rather to his disappointment, made no protest at all.

As he reached the ground a wheel-chair had added itself to the expectant group, and he beheld the notorious Maggie Gatacre.

"Mother—this is Mr.—my mother, Mrs. Gatacre," murmured Violet Robinson, and the old lady nodded. "You

are," she said, "a kind young man. And a brave one. One never knows with parrots, and their beaks are like iron."

The young man's head was in a whirl. What a chance was now his, and how could he best make use of it.

The old lady in the wheel-chair was, he knew, eighty-six years old. He had never known any one of such a vast age. Nor had he ever known a notorious lady. Would she be angry if he made known his knowledge of her? Or would she be hurt if he didn't? The old lady, meantime, was taking stock of him. A moon-faced youth, she thought, somewhat stolid-looking, but he had a good forehead, and good teeth.

Contrary to what one might have hoped, no faintest shadow of a memory stirred in her ancient breast. He reminded her of no one—which was not remarkable, as he was in appearance lamentably unlike his handsome and dashing ancestor.

"D'you like parrots?" she asked suddenly, noticing that the bird still sat on his crooked arm.

"Not particularly," was his truthful reply, "but this one interests me. Did you say her name is Gussie?"

"His name," corrected Mrs. Gatacre; "my daughter always says she, but he's a *he*."

"I thought," was the biographer's artful hint—for now his mind had made itself up—"that Gussie was a girl's name!"

Emily Robinson and her mother exchanged a quick smile, but he did not see it.

"It is," Mrs. Gatacre answered, "as a rule, but as a matter of fact, for some years I believed the bird to be a female—though he was named for a male friend of mine."

How odd it sounded on those dark, ancient lips! "A male friend of mine." But though moon-faced and rather plump, Augustus Fenn's grandson—and biographer—thought quickly, and on some occasions spoke quickly. This was one of such occasions. "I know," he said smiling, "you named her—*him*—for Augustus Fenn."

Mrs. Robinson gave a little gasp, and the red-headed girl laughed, but neither of them spoke. It was plain that they knew and kept their place.

Mrs. Gatacre stared at him from the depths of her eye-sockets where her dried-up old eyes glimmered faintly, like little oysters. "How," she snapped, "did you know? Who are you?"



"My name's Boosey," he began, but she broke in, making an absurd grimace.

"'Phœbus,'" she quoted the immortal Mr. Cotton, "'what a name!'"

"Oh, *Mother*——"

"Yes, it's not very pretty, but my middle ones (my first one of all is Rex) are better! Rex Augustus Fenn Boosey is the whole business."

There was a pause, and then Mrs. Gatacre asked slowly: "Are you his grandson or only a nephew or something?"

"Grandson. His daughter Diana is my mother."

"How wonderful," broke in Emily Robinson; "isn't it marvellous, Grannie?"

"Nonsense. What's wonderful about a man having a grandson?" was the old lady's unamiable retort. "Don't be an idiot, Emily. Mr. Boosey, come and sit down and talk to me," she added. "I don't want you and Emily, Violet . . ."

"Poor old Cuth," Mrs. Gatacre observed, at the end of a rapid exchange of questions from her and answers from Rex—not quite the way he had intended the interview to go, but irresistibly the way it *went*. "I thought he must be dead years ago!"

Yet, Rex reflected, Mr. Cuthbertson was undoubtedly ten or twelve years her junior.

"Oh, yes, he's still alive—more or less," the young man explained. "I've known him all my life, but only a little. I knew he'd known my grandfather, but I never realized that they had been real *friends*. He—Mr. Cuthbertson, I mean—has gone to pieces a good deal, I'm afraid. He drinks, rather, and—oh, well," he broke off helplessly, "I don't know."

"I do. I know *exactly*. He was a very beautiful boy—oh, yes, he *was*!—and Gus was fond of me, in a way, and used to paint me. He sat for Cupid, in Psyche's Awakening. Besides, he had a delightful studio, when all the others were hard up, he used to lend it to them. To Gus——"

Very odd indeed to hear his long dead, and long enshrined grandfather called Gus. A dreadful nickname, Gus. Victoriously saucy.

"And he was a very good-natured creature," the old lady went on, holding her dark little claws with the slate-coloured nails, in the sunshine, and regarding them with what to the young man seemed an incredible complacency. "Very.

Also," she went on, her voice suddenly gaining strength and dropping a tone or two, "he loathed Etta."

"Who was Etta?"

"Your grandmother, Henrietta Bailey, who married my poor Gus while he was but a babe. She was a nobody. Not like I, who was a celebrity in my day—I assure you. Books were written about me, and songs, and that nursery fellow named a rose—a *dark-red* rose—for me. People used to get up in their nasty, dangerous little green chairs in the park and look at me——"

"I know! You were a professional beauty," he replied, not without pride in his bit of ancient lore, but she frowned.

"That I was *not*, then! There was nothing *in* the least professional about me. What I was trying, obviously in vain, to make you understand," she added drily, "was that my claim to fame, so recognized, then, wouldn't have won me one glance nowadays! I ran away with one man, and lived with him openly, and so I had a splendid, wicked notoriety all my own. I was the Notorious Mrs. Gatacre, or the Wicked Mrs. Gatacre. Nowadays, because he was the only one, I should be a mere example of bourgeois virtue."

"Oh, come, Mrs. Gatacre," he said, laughing, "we're surely not quite as bad as that, even in 1932! Not *every* lady runs away with a married man, even nowadays!"

She burst out laughing. "You are cleverer than you look, Mr.—Mr. Booze—"

"You *know* my name isn't Booze. It couldn't possibly be. Nobody's could," he broke in a little wildly, and she nodded.

"Of course I know. It's Boosey. A nice, pleasant name it is, too. What branch of the family is that?"

"The Dorsetshire branch, I suppose. My father was a Dorsetshire parson, as a matter of fact."

"A parson!" commented the notorious lady, adding, oddly to his ears: "Great Cæsar's Ghost!"

"Why?"

"Only—didn't his people object to his marrying Augustus Fenn's daughter?"

"Not a bit. They liked it. You'll be awfully disappointed, I'm afraid, Mrs. Gatacre," he added, not without a spark of malice, "but the last twenty-five years at least, of his life, were lived in an atmosphere of the utmost virtue. A bishop, I remember, once came to have tea with him."

"Which bishop?"

"I can't tell you, but it *was* a bishop, and it must have been in 1911 or '12. I'm twenty-seven, and I must have been six or seven. Oh, yes, the Sage was a model old gentleman from, say, 1895, till he died."

"16th June, 1920," she said. "He just missed the Peace—with his usual luck."

It was very quiet and restful in the little walled garden. The scent of lilac was, in the midday heat, almost too strong; the parrot, restored to his cage, sat in brooding silence, one eye open; the big white clouds had clotted in the blue sky; and in the flying heliotrope buzzed and sought snub bees.

"I should like," Rex began after a drowsy pause, during which he suspected his antique companion of a cat-nap, "to show you parts of my manuscript, if it wouldn't bore you."

Deep in their hollows the oyster-like eyes glimmered palely. "The parts about me," she observed. "Yes, I should like to see them—they are sure to be wrong," she added, more vigorously. "You are sure to have bowdlerized me."

"My mother thinks that on the contrary . . ."

"I saw your mother once, when she was six—just before the divorce it was, in the park. Her front teeth were gone, and her hair was squeezed back with one of those horrible round combs that little girls used to wear——"

"Her front teeth are gone now, but that's a more or less successfully kept secret. Her hair is excellent. After all," he concluded, his mother, hitherto in his eyes rather aged, suddenly seeming almost youthful to him, "she's only fifty-nine."

When he brought his typescript the next afternoon, rain was falling, and had been falling for hours; the old lady sat in a very parrot-cage-like atmosphere, her windows tight shut, a fire burning merrily in her basket-grate.

"Nice and cosy in here," she began, "and I'm glad to see you, Mr. Rex. There are my pictures of your grandfather. Seventeen of them."

The table by the window was indeed crowded with photographs and sketches of his grandfather at all ages. The great painter was there in a satinwood frame as a somewhat superfluously undraped infant of a few months, a mysterious

result of the art of M. Daguerre; he was in a frame of embroidered satin, as a little boy of the '50's, vainglorious in checked trousers, and later were reproduced his various stages of hirsute embellishments.

"Rather splendid, these whiskers," commented Mr. Boosey gravely, "and that brushed-forward hair, too—men *were* hairier in those days, weren't they?"

"Were they? This is the way he looked when I met him—at Richmond, at the old 'Star and Garter,' in '74."

"I know *that* much! At a party given by—Lovey—Luggy—Gascoyne's!"

"Lummey. Lord Lumley Gascoyne was his name. Well"—she took up the big gilt frame, and gazed at the picture for a long moment—"there never," she said with a simplicity that he loved, "was a handsomer man."

And it was true! Augustus had been very handsome.

Rather shyly, young Boosey read from his manuscript the two chapters devoted to the too-well-known-to-be-ignored story of the great painter's love affairs with Mrs. Harry Gatacre. It was well done, and he knew it, but as he read in the silent presence of its sharer, he felt his work to be lifeless, uninteresting, without colour.

It was, in the little room, so stuffy and so warm that his head began to ache, and he suddenly felt as one feels in that awful moment of uncertainty as to whether one is or is not going to be seasick.

"The decree absolute," he finished, "'was pronounced 30th September, 1878, and after that Augustus Fenn spent a year in foreign travel.'"

"Yes," commented his hearer, "a year in foreign travel. They always did, then. If they did now, the island would soon be depopulated. Go on, young man."

"That—that is all I said about the divorce."

"I know that. What else was there to say? *She*—Etta—lived somewhere in Norfolk for the rest of her days, I believe, but nobody really knew, and nobody cared. It was, however, different about *me*."

"Quite so," murmured the young man. "Do you mind," he added desperately, "if I go to the door for a moment—for a little air? I have rather a headache."

When he came back she had got up from her chair and, for the first time since their meeting, was on her feet.

She was, he saw, taller than he had guessed her to be, and even now she was straight-backed.

"Just what," she asked suddenly, as he closed the door behind him, and approached her, "have you said more about me?"

"I haven't said anything, Mrs. Gatacre. You see—I didn't *know* much about you, in the first place."

"Of course, and in the second you wished—so far as you could—to spare his reputation. Didn't you?"

There was in her voice, and in her fleshless little face—all darkened with time and as if already the grave cast its shadow on her—such a concentrated scorn and indignation that he actually drew back a step.

"Answer me. Wasn't that it? Were you not anxious that the future should regard him as a blameless man? A man of unblemished integrity? Well, answer me!"

And that old, old woman actually stamped her foot at him.

"Well, then, yes," he retorted, stung into unwilling self-defence, "I suppose I was. Of course I was. He *was* a man of integrity, too, except——" He stopped short.

"Except for me! If there's one thing I hate," she retorted, with a scathing emphasis he had never, in our free-tongued, mild-emotioned age, heard, "it's a fool. *Sit* down," she added, suddenly, and he obeyed.

"You think," she went on, pointing a dark, leaden-hued tipped finger at him, "that I was the blot on that otherwise perfect life. (Don't interrupt me!) You think that the minute he left me—in 1879, when my husband did not—contrary to the hopes of everyone—divorce *me*—*he* went back, so to speak, into the bosom of respectability."

Feeling utterly feeble and helpless, the young man listened to the astounding flood of words that poured from those eighty-six-year-old lips.

"You think that he said to himself 'Come, I will sin no more: I'll be a man of whom Albert the Good would have approved. Henceforth I will live'?"—she gave a singular hoot of laughter—"like a monk!" And you think that he did, don't you? Well, young man, *he didn't*. Why Harry Gatacre wouldn't divorce me doesn't concern you, but he wouldn't, and when he begged me to return to him, I did, and lived for twenty-four years after your grandmother got her divorce and was crushed by it, here in this house, chiefly in

this very room as *Mrs. Harry Gatacre*. Oh, yes, as I've said, I was the *Notorious* Mrs. G., but Mrs. G. I remained, though everybody in the world knew that I had been his—lover."

"I wish," said Rex anxiously, "that you'd sit down, Mrs. Gatacre, and *please* don't get so excited. I know that my grandfather loved you—I've seen letters he wrote about you to a friend, and it is *adoration* those letters express. So please don't think I'm fool enough to regard it as an—an amourette, even though for the family's sake, and, as you say, for his own as well, I have tried—in my book to—to—well, damn it, to whitewash him!"

Mrs. Gatacre sat down. "I like you," she murmured, laughing noiselessly, "I *do* like you. You're plain, but you said that *like him*. And I see that you *can* understand."

There was a long pause while rain crashed softly against the windows and the neglected fire crashed as softly into cream-coloured ash.

Then Mrs. Gatacre spoke again. "You're right, I'm a fool to work myself up so, for I am very old. Very old indeed. I don't talk much to my daughter, though—she's a good soul, but a bore—so for once this won't hurt me! And if you promise to put one more paragraph—may it be?—into that chapter about *us*—I'll be grateful to you, and—shut up."

"Shut up?" remarked the hitherto silent Gussie.

"Be quiet, you idiot! Yes, Mr. Booze—Mr. Boosey, just one paragraph. You see I *do* realize that he belongs to the world, and that it's better for the world not to know too much, and I understand your family feeling, too. I was *flagrant*. So leave in all that you have written and add just the one sentence that will heal in me a—a hurt that in over forty years has never ceased to hurt."

Boosey settled his spectacles more solidly on his small nose, and took a notebook and fountain-pen from his pocket. "Will you," he said gently, "dictate your paragraph—or paragraphs—to me?"

And while the now-roused parrot scratched himself, pecked at his cage, and muttered gutturally, the notorious Mrs. Gatacre dictated

"'After the divorce,'" she began slowly, "'Augustus Fenn travelled for over a year, and when he came back, I have now ascertained beyond a doubt, he and Mr. and Mrs. Harry Gatacre had an interview which decided the course

of his future life. At this meeting Fenn implored Gatacre to let his wife divorce him, or even to divorce her, so that he, Fenn, might marry her, but Gatacre definitely refused to do this, and in his resolution he never wavered. After a long talk together in Gatacre's voluntary absence in the house—the interview took place in the garden of Gatacre's house in St. John's Wood—Mrs. Gatacre and Fenn agreed to part once and for all, and, acting in accordance with Fenn's counsel, Mrs. Gatacre accepted her husband's offer to take her back, and," the old voice was suddenly very feeble and cracked, "'Mr. and Mrs. Gatacre lived together in unbroken friendship till his death in Nineteen-eleven.' There! That's all. Will you put it in?"

"I will, indeed. It is—perfect. You are wonderful."

The life had suddenly ebbed from her face, which was now less that of a living woman than that of a mummy, and she did not answer for a long moment.

Then, leaning forward in her chair, she laid her hand—cold, imponderable, like a bird's claw—in his.

"But," she almost whispered, "*we went on meeting!* We loved each other till he died. He was here, sitting in the very chair you're sitting in, only three months before he died."

"By Jove, was he really!" There was admiration in the young man's voice. "The old scoundrel, how on earth did he manage it! My mother hardly ever left him, and for the last ten years he had a kind of valet-nurse—Frosch, an Alsatian—who simply *never* left his side!"

The notorious Mrs. Gatacre nodded, smiling. "*Der gute Frosch*—Froggy! Oh, yes," she commented simply, "he always came too." Then she added the incredible, preposterous words: "They came by the underground passage."

"The underground——" For a moment Boosey felt that she was what, in the undress of his unuttered thoughts, he called pulling his leg.

There are no underground passages nowadays in London, and this wonderful old lady was a liar. But he felt, the second after, that it was true.

"It's not very romantic, the passage," she continued, "it wasn't, even in '79, when he discovered it, but it *is* an underground passage. It used to join the Cistercian Monastery of King John's time, I think it was—they say there are many such passages up here in the old 'Wood.' At

all events our bit led from the wine-cellar of Mr. Fenn's new house in Ave Maria Place, off Abbey Road, to the old grotto in our garden. You must have noticed the grotto yesterday?"

Rex nodded. "Yes, I remember it. There's a faun or something in it——"

"Exactly. My husband was a great student, and one day he came across a description of these underground passages, in one of his old books, and investigated the grotto—which used to have a statue of the Virgin Mary in it, I believe. The entrance was blocked, but he had it opened. I remember," the old lady continued dreamily, "the day the workmen found the entrance. That was just after he—Harry—had refused to divorce me, and persuaded me to come back to him. The passage was terribly damp, and there was a skull in it, and there were rats."

"How very unpleasant."

"Yes. We did nothing with it at first, but later he had it drained and cleaned, and parts of the pavement mended."

"My grandfather?"

"Not at all. My husband. It was he who did it all. He was a wonderful man."

"He must have been!"

The old lady turned on him. "Don't you dare sneer at Harry Gatacre, young man!" she cried angrily. "It was entirely owing to him that your grandfather became the happy man he was—and if he'd not been happy, he never could have done the splendid work he did in the late '80's, and the '90's——"

She broke off as Boosey murmured an apology, and closed her eyes.

"I am very tired," she whispered. "It is horrible to be so old . . ."

"Please don't try," he answered remorsefully, "to tell me any more to-day; let me come back to-morrow, or some other day."

"No, no. When one is eighty-six, one can't count on 'some other day'—or even on to-morrow. But I'll be very brief. It was in '75 that I left this house—this very room!—and went to Paris and Italy with Mr. Fenn. We were away a year and when we came back I lived with him openly—



as the Notorious Mrs. Gatacre—in his new studio in Holland Park. He *wanted* her to divorce him.”

“I *know* this part, dear Mrs. Gatacre,” broke in the young man anxiously. “Can’t you spare yourself repeating it? I know that it wasn’t till ’78 that—my grandmother consented to divorce him, and I know that he had hoped that Mr. Gatacre would divorce you, so that he could marry you——”

The old lady nodded and opened her eyes. “Good. But you see, Harry *wouldn’t*. In that interview I told you about, Augustus implored him to divorce me, and he refused, and we knew that nothing could make him, so as you know I stayed on with Harry.”

“It’s a marvellous story.”

“It is—more marvellous than you yet know. Now listen. This is *not* for your book. It’s a secret, and you will, I know, always keep it, *always*.”

“I—indeed I will, Mrs. Gatacre.”

“Well, then, here’s the secret. My husband, who had made me come back, firstly, because he was, in a queer, fatherly way, fond of me, and, secondly, so that the scandal about his name—it’s an old Hereford name—might die down—gave us his full permission to meet whenever we liked so long as it was only in this house, and by means of the underground passage!”

“Good Lord!” gasped the young man. “I never heard of such a thing in my life!”

“Yes. As I’ve said, we never ceased seeing each other until within a few days of his death, and when my poor Harry died, Augustus came at night bringing the most beautiful flowers for him, to say good-bye to him.”

(What a story—if only it weren’t about his own grandfather!)

“Wonderful. What a wonderful man Mr. Gatacre must have been. And,” Rex added solemnly, “how awfully happy you must have been, all those years!”

The old lady stared at him. “Oh, yes, I was happy, of course, but—I had given up a great deal——”

“How d’you mean, given up a great deal?”

“I mean that—well, there was no more driving my basket-carriage with two white ponies in the park—no more *excitement*, and I loved excitement.”

“Oh!” He felt slightly deflated.

"Yes. I had been famous in a way, and now I was obscure . . ."

She sighed, and it was like the rustle of dead leaves.

"But still, you *were* happy?" persisted Boosey. "I am most honoured by your confidence, dear Mrs. Gatacre, and I assure you I will never tell a living soul what you have told me—and I *should* like to know that your sacrifice wasn't in vain?"

"Yes, then," was her answer, "I was happy. In a way. But——"

Suddenly she laughed. "I'm sure," she said, "that you never read Wilhlem Busch?"

"I've read 'Max and Moritz,'" was his doubtful reply. "He wrote it didn't he?"

"Oh, yes, but 'Max and Moritz' is *nothing*. He was a great satirist and a great artist. And—well, I'll tell you first about how I felt. I was devoted to my kind and charming husband, and naturally I was grateful to him for taking me back, and I *loved* Augustus Fenn. I never had another lover but him, and never wanted one. I was in *love* with him, as well, till the day he died, but—after I came back here—there was no more excitement."

"It was a pity, then, that Mr. Gatacre knew! If you could have kept him from knowing about the underground passage, and been afraid of his discovering my grandfather's visits," suggested the young man with retrospective hopefulness.

But she shook her head. "Oh, it wasn't *danger* I wanted. It was excitement. The excitement of having people stare at me, and tell each other I was '*that* Mrs. Gatacre', '*the wicked Maggie Gatacre*', etc. Ah, yes, I missed that," she sighed. Then she held up her hand. "You must go now, Mr. Boosey, I am tired . . ."

He took that dry, brittle, little paw in his large, warm hand. "I can't thank you enough," he said. "It's been the most wonderful afternoon in my whole life. I may come again, mayn't I? When I get back from the Norfolk Broads? But—before I go won't you tell me what you meant about Wilhlem Busch?"

She nodded. "Yes. He drew a picture and wrote a verse in one of his long illustrated poems—I think in '*The Pious Helen*', in which two happy lovers were called by someone, looking at them, '*Godless and Envious*.' And it's that that

I mean. I was always godless when I had a lover—in the '70's and '80's, and even the '90's to have a lover was *always* considered godless—but so soon as my dear husband discovered the underground passage, and allowed us to meet here, and *no one knew about us*, I—I ceased to be enviable. One cannot be envied about something that nobody knows! Even you," the old woman added unkindly, "can see that."

"Yes, even I. Well," he went on, trying to smile, "I will say good-bye now. Thank you *very* much, dear Mrs. Gatacre. You have been wonderful to me, and I will keep your—your beautiful secret till I die——"

"I am sure you will. Good-bye, Mr. Boosey. I am glad that when your book comes out people will understand——"

To Rex it did not seem that the publication of his book would make anyone understand anything, so entirely had the old woman's extraordinary revelation altered his opinion of his grandfather, of her, of her hitherto so colourless though ungenerous husband—of, in short, the whole 1870's, '80's and '90's and the first two decades of the present century.

He felt, he reflected, as he again shook that birdlike hand, and found his way to the house-door, as if he had just been violently butted by a goat and was standing more or less on his head.

"*What* a story," he was thinking as he opened the gate. "If I were a novelist, now——"

And then he met Mrs. Robinson, and they shook hands under her dripping umbrella.

"I do hope," he said, after a few words about the old lady, "that I haven't stayed too long? She was so extraordinarily interesting."

Mrs. Robinson's commonplace face was kind. "Oh, no," she returned, "it does her good to talk herself out, once in a while, and of course she was delighted to meet *you*."

"She was—*wonderful* to me."

"She *is* wonderful, isn't she? I often think it's a pity I bore her so," continued the placid lady with the string-bag full of parcels, "but I always did."

"Dear me!"

"Oh, yes, didn't she tell you?" she smiled.

"She—er—she was very busy talking about my grandfather," he retorted a little clumsily, and she laughed.

"*Poor* Mr. Boosey, I shouldn't have asked you, but never

mind! She told you, of course," she went on, "all about the underground passage?"

"Oh! I—she—I gathered that it was a secret—but of course," he added, "*you* would know, being her daughter."

Mrs. Robinson nodded. "Oh, yes, I know. We all know—I mean Emily, my girl, whom you saw, and her, *Mamma's*, own friends. What we *don't* know," she went on thoughtfully, a little frown on her kind brow, "is whether *she* knows——"

"Whether she knows *what*?" Again he had that butted feeling of utter upside-downness.

"Why, whether or no she knows," Mrs. Robinson answered, a little surprised, "that—that she made it all up."

"Made it all up?"

"The—story—of—my—poor—father's—discovering—that—underground—passage," explained the patient lady slowly, wondering whether after all he was not just a trifle dim-witted, "and—allowing—Augustus Fenn—to—use—it—for—over—forty years."

"Then—he *didn't*? I mean to say, Mr. Gatacre *didn't* allow my grandfather——"

He broke off; it was too much for him, but the middle-aged lady only smiled gently.

"Allow him to go on seeing his wife? But of course he didn't. My father was devoted to my mother, and I'm glad to say that when he forgave her, and took her back, she was grateful to him, and did her best to make him happy."

"And my poor grandfather——"

"Oh, your poor grandfather—it's rather difficult to tell you," Mrs. Robinson answered gravely, "but after the divorce, Mr. Fenn rather let my poor mother down. No doubt it was quite *natural* for him to—to get over it, but it was hard on Mamma."

"I—I see," murmured Rex, feeling guilty and miserable. "But he surely did want to marry her?"

"He *offered* to, of course, but Papa saw at once that it was only from a sense of duty, so he said no, that he would never divorce her. It was," she went on quietly, "the best thing for them all."

"I suppose so. It's—it's a bit hard for me to grasp, but no doubt it *was* best. And—they were happy?"

"Oh, yes, quite as happy as most people," returned the

plump lady under the umbrella, innocently cynical. "I," she added hastily, "was born in '81, and my sister in '83——"

"And my poor grandfather," inquired Rex vaguely, and unjustifiably hurt by these dates, "never saw her again?"

"Never. *That* I know quite definitely. Mr. Fenn," she added in an apologetic voice, "was a very—gay man, you know, and very popular, and I never had the impression that he—er—*pined* for Mamma."

Never had Mr. Boosey felt so young, so inexperienced, and Mrs. Robinson looked kindly at him, though in her efforts to keep his head shielded by the umbrella the back of her neck was being drenched."

"I'm afraid," she said, "that you are disappointed, but—Emily and I never dreamed you'd *believe* her. It *is* such a wild story."

"Oh, yes, I believed her. I usually do believe people."

His round face was full of a certain woeful vexation, and she hastened to say:

"I mean, we thought that you, who knew him and who are writing his life, would know him better——"

"Than to believe that for forty years he'd go crawling round underground passages to see a woman—*one* woman!" His voice was fierce. "I should, indeed, have known better, but I was a fool! A silly young ass, that's what I was——"

"Well, even if you were, my dear boy," she comforted him, "you are in good company. Mr. Swinburne believed every word of it!"

"The *poet* Swinburne?"

"Yes, the poet. He nearly wept with disappointment when he knew."

"Then—she's been—doing it for years?"

"For years. Try," the kind woman added anxiously, "not to be too angry with her—she is *very* old."

The young man burst into the sudden, gay laughter of relief. "Of course I won't be angry. I was a donkey to be cross! She's a wonderful old lady, whichever way one looks at the story, and—it's the finest leg-pull of my life!"

He held out his hand, and she shook it. "Good," she answered, "I'm *so* glad you take it like this. Some people won't. There was one French critic who was *very* unpleasant about it—but," she added, shifting her string-bag full of parcels to the other hand, and giving her umbrella a shake,

"you won't forget, will you, that poor Mamma may, after all, *believe* it. That's what I always tell Emily, and my boy, John. We musn't lose sight of the possibility that poor Grand-mamma may believe it——"

Boosey promised not to lose sight of the possibility, and made his way homeward through the rain.

He never saw Mrs. Gatacre again, for she died while he was on his holiday on the Norfolk Broads with Jimmie Ladd, but he printed her so unintentionally truthful paragraphs in his book, and he never forgot her citation from the admirable and far-too-little-known Wilhelm Busch :

*Gottlos und Beneidenswerth :*

Godless and Envious.



## HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

### *Semolino*

Horace Annesley Vachell is President of the Dickens Fellowship. He was an officer in the Army before he started writing, and in a long literary career of over forty years has published a very large number of successful plays and novels, including *The Hill*, *Quinneys* and *Fishpingle*.





## SEMOLINO

### I

**I**F you do not believe this story to be true, ask Gloriani himself. Take the trouble to order his fritto misto and a semolina pudding, with a bottle of red Capri, then you will be sure to hear the story with corroborative detail. Of course you know Gloriani, the padrone of the Cosmopolis Restaurant. Possibly you are not a Londoner. In that case a word of description will enable you to recognize this great man whenever you have the honour of meeting him. He strongly resembles Napoleon I and Caruso, and he combines in one personality the great qualities of the Corsican and the Neapolitan. To see him upon the night of some festival, marshalling his army of waiters, is to realize the presence of a conqueror upon the field of battle. At such a moment only the thoughtlessly brave would dare to engage him in talk irrelevant to the conduct of his campaign. But, happily, there are other moments when the illustrious man is more approachable. Seek him, then, and a reward will be yours. Ask, as a special grace, to be permitted the favour of glancing at his autograph album, in which grateful clients, whose names are household words in kingdoms and republics, have testified their appreciation of the Cosmopolis Restaurant and its incomparable padrone.

Gloriani employs waiters of the Latin race only. Possibly he shares with our most eminent soldier and the present scribe the conviction that a Teuton invasion of England is impending. For my own part, I confess that the German waiter, apart from his moustache, fills me with apprehension. To me, he represents the invasion itself. I am obstinately of the opinion that every man carries in his pocket a phial of some deadly vegetable alkaloid, which, at the wave of an imperial hand, will be popped into our national soup! Given a hundred thousand German waiters with a gilt-edged opportunity of destroying swiftly and painlessly (for their autocrat is admittedly

a humane man) fifty persons apiece—a modest estimate—and we start the war of the world with a loss of five million British subjects. A Zeppelin airship, in wireless communication with Potsdam, would accomplish what was left to do in a few hours. As a first-class Power we should be—to quote the language of the ring—down and out before the Territorial Army had kissed its wives and sisters good-bye !

I have now stated, as briefly and convincingly as possible, my reason for selecting the Cosmopolis in preference to other restaurants where the food may be as good, but certainly not better.

I used to lunch there when I was rehearsing a play at an adjacent theatre. I dine there frequently. I sup regularly. As a rule, a small table in a corner of the room downstairs is assigned to me, and invariably the same waiter ministers to my simple wants. The first of them was a charming fellow, a Sicilian, quiet and quick as a cat, with truly remarkable powers of divination. Sated, as a man must be at times, with ordinary food, I felt as secure in leaving myself in Agostino's hands as a man negotiating a new country upon the back of a tried and veteran hunter. With the smile which St. Michael craved and obtained from the Creator, he would whisper into my ear the name of some plat which at once restored my appetite and a proper sympathy with my fellow-diners.

But he was not perfect. Who is ?

He had a chronic cough—a churchyard cough—and a hectic flush in his thin, olive cheeks. Gloriani listened to that cough for nearly six months, frowned, and shook his head. One day Agostino said to me :

“Signore, I'm off to Sicily ; the sunshine will cure my cough—nothing else.”

“You ought to have gone before, ”Tino.”

He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands, palms uppermost.

“I had not the money, signore.” Then he added : “The padrone has been very good. He has engaged my young brother without a premium. He will keep my place warm. Unhappily, he is inexperienced. If he should make blunders, perhaps the signore will speak a word for him to the padrone, who holds the signore in such high esteem.”

“Of course,” I replied. “Rest easy, ”Tino ! I'll keep an eye on your brother. Va bene !”

"The signore is the kindest of men."

Next day a strange waiter presented himself at my table.

"I am Bartolomeo, signore, the brother of Agostino. He has gone to Sicily. Perhaps he will not come back."

I was so overcome that I ordered a cut from the joint and a semolina pudding, which, at the Cosmopolis, is no ordinary nursery sweet. The fact that it is made with eggs laid by Italian hens in Italy at once differentiates it from the common or garden British variety. Agostino's brother was handing the pudding to me, when it struck me suddenly that his name was absurd. Bartolomeo! What a mouthful!

"Why do you call yourself by such a name? It is an intolerable waste of time."

"Si, signore."

He had his brother's disarming smile. And he looked about eighteen. There was a humorous sparkle in his velvety brown eyes.

"For practical purposes you might just as well call yourself—Semolino."

"Si, signore."

"I rechristen you Semolino. Do you hear? I called your brother 'Tino, for short. I shall call you 'Lino.'"

"Si, signore."

"If you are half as capable as 'Tino I shall be satisfied."

"The signore may rest assured that I shall do my best to please him. My brother will rejoice to hear that I'm waiting upon the signore."

He pleased me and he pleased others, notwithstanding the fact that he was inexperienced. At the beginning of our friendship a catastrophe happened. A passing client jogged his elbow at the moment when he was serving me with a purée of artichokes. My new dress-coat was flooded! I might have gone to a Covent Garden ball as our one and only sauce—melted butter! I hesitated before bursting into speech, because my sense of what was fitting told me that the right choice of expletives was a serious matter. Semolino burst into tears!

I assured him that the matter was of no consequence, and that we must console ourselves with the reflection that we had afforded much amusement to a room full of my compatriots, who enjoy nothing quite so much as the spectacle of somebody else being made supremely ridiculous. I retired with Gloriani,

removed my coat, slipped into my overcoat, and returned to my table.

After this, Semolino became my faithful slave.

And within a month he was the most popular person in the restaurant, always excepting the padrone. Perhaps I should have mentioned before that he was amazingly handsome; he had the face of a Neapolitan fisher-lad and the features of an Antinous. And when he smiled you believed in the legend of St. Michael. Everybody called him "Lino."

About this time—I omit dates—Stella Maris was captivating London as a dancer. Mystery attached itself to her. She spoke English fluently, but with a slight accent. Obviously, she was a daughter of the Latin race, who danced with a fire and passion which demoralized hard-working, respectable fathers of families. And against her, oddly enough, was not a word of scandal. On account of this, country parsons justified themselves in coming to see her performance.

I met her first in company with a critic. We were shown into a dressing-room, where Stella received our compliments and introduced us to a formidable lady with a beard, her aunt and watch-dog. My friend began to talk "shop." Stella made a perceptible gesture of impatience. Obviously, "shop" bored her. I turned to the aunt, divining the subject nearest to her heart.

"What does the signora think of our English food?"

The signora gave a snort.

"I do not permit myself to think of it at all," she replied grimly. "It is good, yes, at your great restaurants; but the cost! Santa Madonna!"

She added with a fat sigh: "I think of the time when I shall eat once more a fish soup and a fritto misto."

"Is it possible," said I, "that you have not eaten a fritto misto at Gloriani's?"

"We have never heard of Gloriani," the ignorant old woman replied.

"Dio mio!" I exclaimed. "In that case, my dear lady, I am going to place you for ever under an immeasurable obligation. If you will do me the honour of eating breakfast to-morrow chez Gloriani, I promise you fish soup in perfection, a fritto misto which I shall not dare describe, and a bottle of Capri vecchio—not to mention other things."

"Stella, do you hear?"

"Every word," said the signorina. "We are engaged, but we will cancel our engagement."

"Are you Italians?" asked my friend.

"We are Sicilians."

"So much the better! I shall have the honour of presenting to you a waiter, Semolino, with the sunshine of your enchanted island upon his lips and the fires of Etna in his heart."

"Semolino?"

"Lino, for short. His real name is Bartolomeo."

"Bartolomeo?" repeated the signorina in melting tones. "Of all names in the calendar, it is the sweetest."

"Then it is understood? At one—chez Gloriani, Cosmopolis Restaurant."

"At one. Va bene!"

"To the re-seeing!"

"To the re-seeing!"

## II

Early next morning I had a word with the padrone. At the mention of Stella's name his eyes sparkled with the light of genius.

"Ecco!" he whispered, pressing my arm. "You will leave everything to me. I feel myself inspired. It is foolish to anticipate, but the collazione shall be worthy of—of—us!"

"A star luncheon?"

"Ma!"

Gloriani uplifted hands and eyes in a gesture that Salvini never surpassed. Then, in a tone of real concern, he asked: "What has the signore had for his first breakfast? Eggs and bacon—no?"

"A cup of coffee and a slice of bread!"

"Heaven be praised! When I had the honour of meeting the signore for the first time, I said to myself, 'He is not as these others!'"

He bowed and excused himself. Time was too precious to be wasted.

At one, punctually, I received my guests—Stella, her aunt, and my friend. Our entry, under the escort of Gloriani, caused a ripple of excitement. Stella was quietly dressed, and as demure as a French girl just out of a convent, but her face was known to three-fourths of those present. Moreover,

Gloriani's manner, his profound bow, his expanded chest—these indicated a momentous occasion.

The table was decorated with maidenhair and allamandas. Each lady found a flower in her napkin. These, in my brutal ignorance, I deemed not quite the right thing. I did not recognize the flower, asphodel, which, for the rest, is not conspicuously beautiful in colour or form. But instantly, with a cry of appreciation, Stella seized the asphodel and pressed it to her lips, with a glance of gratitude at me which positively flamed.

"Signore," she exclaimed, "you are adorable!"

I blushed.

"To think—of this!"

"And *this*," added the aunt, gloating over the menu. "Ecco!"

My head was whirling, for I perceived that the signorina's aunt was considering the propriety of embracing me. I stammered out:

"You must thank Gloriani."

"For the asphodel—no!" said the great man. He pointed to the flower already tucked in Stella's bosom. "That was the happy thought of 'Lino."

'Lino, napkin upon arm, smiled sweetly. As he met the dancer's glance, he added, with a sigh:

"I brought the plant from Sicily. It has just flowered."

"I am in Sicily," said Stella.

We attacked the zuppa di pesce alla Stella Maris, but it is not my intention to describe the gastronomic triumph of Gloriani, nor the appetites which we brought to the collazione. Take it from me that the breakfast was a star performance upon the part of all who assisted at it. I may be pardoned, perhaps, for mentioning that the good aunt had four helpings of the fritto misto. We chattered gaily; Gloriani hovered round us, presenting the appearance of a stout, wingless guardian angel; Semolino waited with incomparable grace and suavity.

And then a delicious silence encompassed us when we lighted our cigarettes, while the reek of the most aromatic coffee in London ascended into the high heaven of our content.

Stella spoke first.

She addressed me, and some curious inflexion of her voice,

some subtle play of mouth and eyes, told me that she was expressing in the simplest words a simple fact :

" I am in love with Bartolomeo ! "

" Signorina ! "

" He is a Sicilian. And he is the most beautiful boy I have ever seen. And his name is Bartolomeo. "

The vowels dropped like Hybla honey from her red lips.

" Also, " said I, rather shortly, " he is a waiter. "

" A waiter ? Ebbene ! What of it ! Once I danced, barefoot, in the streets of Palermo. "

" It is a privilege to be a waiter in this ristorante, " murmured the good aunt.

" Shush-h-h-h ! " said I.

The most beautiful boy was approaching with a bottle of Gloriani's oldest brandy in his hand. Stella stared at him impudently, but her voice was like the coo of a dove when she said :

" Bartolomeo, have you seen me dance ? "

" No, signorina. "

" You must. "

" The signorina is too kind, but I am a waiter. "

My own words !

" And I am a peasant—I ! " She spoke proudly. " I was telling the signore just now that I have danced, barefoot, in the streets of Palermo. "

" The signorina doesn't understand. I am on duty here, when the signorina is enchanting all London. "

" I shall speak to your padrone. Va bene ! And I shall send you a seat—a good seat. "

" Two seats, " murmured I. " Then he will bring his best girl. "

" Have you a best girl ? " asked Stella.

" A best girl, signorina ? Certainly not. "

" It is quite incredible, " said the aunt.

" You are faithful to your fidanzata in Sicily, is it not so ? "

" Signorina, I have no fidanzata either in Sicily or here. "

" You will come to see me dance to-night. It is settled. "

Five minutes later the affair was arranged with Gloriani, and with a discretion and cleverness humiliating for a Briton to witness. Stella made a speech which proved that her tongue was as nimble as her feet. Those who had assisted at the colazione—Gloriani first and foremost, the chef, and Bartolomeo



—must give to a grateful girl the opportunity of thanking them in her own way, after a fashion which only artists could understand. A box was at Gloriani's disposition ; two stalls awaited the chef's acceptance ; a seat in the dress-circle should be reserved for Bartolomeo.

Gloriani bowed like an archduke. The signorina's kind thoughts for those who had ministered to her were like rain-drops falling upon a parched podere. There were difficulties—yes ; but he and the chef—ah, what an artist that one !—and the little Bartolomeo would be at the signorina's lovely feet that night. Surely ? But—surely !

The restaurant was nearly empty when the party broke up. The good aunt squeezed my hand with fervour.

"The poverina loves Bartolomeo," she whispered, "but I, signore, I love you." She beamed at me out of her black, beady little eyes.

"To the re-seeing !"

"To the re-seeing !"

### III

Within a week I knew that the affair was serious. Oh, these Sicilians ! Stella and her aunt became habituées of the Cosmopolis. Gloriani beamed rapturously, for London was beginning to discover that Stella Maris might be seen eating spaghetti or risotto some time between the hours of one and three at his restaurant. After twelve it became impossible to get a table. To quote a sage : "Sweet are the uses of advertisement !"

You will understand, therefore, that when I took upon myself to speak a word to Gloriani concerning Agostino's brother, that word was not received in quite the right spirit. I had suggested the propriety of sending Semolino away for a holiday.

"Stella Maris comes here to see *him*," I said, with acerbity. It was not a tactful remark, but Gloriani only shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"For that reason," he said, "we must keep the boy here. You cannot ask a fisherman to throw away his bait."

"She would come, anyway, to eat your risotto," I added, alas ! too late.

Gloriani's eyes twinkled.

"After what the signore has said I dare not run risks. Never have I done such business ! Never !"

But I am an obstinate man, and my pledge to Agostino festered. At all hazards I was determined to rescue his brother from a siren, likely to destroy a good fellow, body and soul. For Stella had become brazen. The few, who never fail to scatter scandal broadcast over London, were muttering to each other that the dancer was infatuated with a waiter ! The star—regarded as coldly distant—had fallen, blazing, into the middle of a restaurant. A roseate paper published the following :

"Does your grandmamma like macaroni ?"

"No ; but the lovely niece of my stout aunt adores—Semolino !"

That night, after supper, I spoke like a father to 'Lino.

"You are playing with fire—I mean fire is playing with you."

"Si, signore."

"You will be burnt up."

"No, signore. Have no fear."

"But I tell you there will be trouble. Don't say 'Ebbene' and smile ! It exasperates me. I promised Agostino to look after you. When is he coming back ?"

"Next week, signore."

"Thank Heaven ! Meanwhile, be very careful. Can't you get the chicken-pox or mumps—something infectious ?"

Semolino laughed gaily.

"The signore is wonderful—and of a resource. But," he laughed again, "if I fall ill the signorina has promised to nurse me."

"Dio mio !" said I.

"It is a bore," said this amazing youth gravely ; "but what would you ? It brings good gold to the ristorante."

"Hang the ristorante ! Look here, 'Lino. Are you really and truly fireproof ?"

"Si, signore."

"Your heart remains cold ?"

"Si, signore."

"Pon my soul, I can't understand it. She'd melt asbestos. Do you meet her outside the restaurant ?"

"No, signore ; always I refuse to give the signorina my address."

"By the way, where do you live?"

The young rascal at once exhibited confusion. I made certain he had been lying. After a moment's hesitation he said:

"Agostino and I used to live in Soho, but now——"

"Well?"

"I board with a cousin on Eyre Street Hill. My cousin is an ice-cream seller—of the most respectable."

"Eyre Street Hill. And your number?"

He answered with reluctance: "Thirty-seven bis."

"I am going to visit your cousin."

"That is as the signore pleases."

#### IV

I walked to Eyre Street Hill upon the following afternoon. It is hard by Hatton Garden, where in days of yore St. Christopher entertained the Virgin Queen and her Court in a pleasance which still bears his name, and in which to-day diamonds sparkle instead of wits. The quarter, for the most part, is inhabited by Italians: organ-grinders, plaster of Paris figure-sellers, models, and the venders of what is euphemistically called—ice-cream. The quarter has an air, an atmosphere, quite its own. Girls, with a fazzolletto upon their black pates, pop in and out of low doors. Through the windows, bordered by gaily painted shutters, you catch glimpses of heads seldom seen in our chilly latitudes, the heads which Andrea del Sarto and Raphael placed upon canvas, heads with low, broad brows, great velvety eyes, and the nobly cut features of the Latin race.

The door of thirty-seven bis was opened by a very handsome girl.

"I want to see the cousin of Bartolomeo, who is waiter at the Cosmopolis Restaurant."

"Si, signore. I am his cousin. Will the signore deign to enter?"

"You are his *cousin*?" said I.

"Si, signore."

I pride myself upon seeing farther into a stone wall than some people. This girl was hardly out of her teens and quite charming. I understood why Lino had been able to withstand

the wiles of the dancer. And I interpreted at the same moment his embarrassment, his confusion, when I proposed to visit his cousin.

"Oh, ho! You are married!" said I, with a glance at her left hand.

"Si, signore."

"And Bartolomeo is married too."

She stared at me in astonishment. Then she threw back her glorious head and laughed.

"The signore knows our little secret?"

"I do," said I; "and I'm very much relieved. I was getting anxious, very anxious."

"About Stella Maris?"

"Just so."

"As if she counted!" Her voice melted into a whisper. "Why, Stella comes from here."

"From—*here*? Dio!"

"She is proud now. She never visits the quarter. But her own mother was one of the posari. *Che canaglia!*"

Let it be understood that the models are at the very lowest rung of the social ladder in Eyre Street Hill. No ice-cream-seller, for example, would mate with one of the despised posari. Stella Maris might be a star of the first magnitude in Leicester Square; on Eyre Street Hill she was regarded as *canaglia!*

"She does not come here now," continued the speaker. "But wait till her husband arrives."

"Her husband?" I gasped.

"He is of the quarter, too. He is not proud, that one. He will make her come."

"Stella Maris is married?"

"Why, of course. I thought the signore knew. We marry young; it is, perhaps, wisest. You see, we are flesh and blood. It is better to marry, as the Saint Apostle says. The signore is married?"

"I am not," said I.

"Of course," continued Bartolomeo's cousin in a lower tone, "the signore understands that Stella must not have an inkling of the truth."

"But why not?"

"Ecco! She brings gold to the ristorante."

"I perceive that all is said. Addio, signora!"

"A rivederci, signore."

I was so upset that I took a hansom back to my flat. I tried to look at this astounding affair through Latin eyes, and saw nothing but a blurred image. Perhaps out of the mirk the figure of Stella's husband, who was of the quarter, bulked largest. What would he have to say when he joined his wife?

That question was destined to be answered sooner than I expected.

I supped that night at the Cosmopolis. 'Lino waited upon me as usual, but Stella Maris did not appear. As I was leaving the restaurant, Gloriani touched my arm and led me aside. I could see that he was perturbed. This in itself pricked my curiosity, for always, even upon the night of the 'Varsity Boat Race, he allowed nothing to ruffle his Napoleonic imperturbability.

"The signore was right. I beg his pardon."

"Eh?"

"It seems that the signorina is a signora."

"Of course."

"If the signore had mentioned it I should have dismissed 'Lino, temporarily."

"Well?"

"The signorina's husband is in London—a terrible man!"

I have a strain of Scots blood in me. I said, with exasperating indifference, "Indeed!"

"Signore, you speak with the cold blood of your great nation, but I—I, Gloriani, tremble."

He spoke in a basso-profundo which stirred my marrow. I had a vision of a swarthy Sicilian, black-bearded, carrying a naked knife in a huge hand, and running amok through a saloon panelled in pink brocade.

"If there should be a scene in my restaurant——"

To cheer him, I said, with feigned enthusiasm: "What an 'ad' for you—even if the carpet were ruined!"

Gloriani turned eyes of reproach upon mine.

"The signore doesn't imagine that I want an 'ad' of that kind?"

I hastened to offer my apologies.

"It is nothing. The signore likes his joke. But I propose that we speak together with 'Lino. It is my business, you understand, to know nothing sometimes. But how far, I ask myself, has this affair gone?"

"'Lino," said I, "must be a lineal descendant of Joseph. He despises Stella Maris."

"*Despises*—Stella Maris ! "

"Stella once lived near Hatton Garden. That's why she speaks English so well. Her mother was a model. Her father—well, nobody knows anything about him."

"Which, under the circumstances, is not surprising. Of the posari ! Testa della Madonna ! "

"The husband, it seems, is in the higher walk of life : a plaster-cast seller."

"Of the figurista ? Dio ! "

"It is all very surprising."

"Stella is a great artist," said Gloriani reverently. "As artist, I bend my knee to her ; as woman—I spit. Ma ! "

"Meantime," said I, "we both think that a holiday would do 'Lino a lot of good. And the sooner we tell him so, the better."

"The signore reads my mind like an open book."

By this time the restaurant was half empty. 'Lino was summoned. But, to my amazement, when it was suggested that a short rest might benefit his health, he said obstinately : "I have done nothing. Why should I go ? "

"This man is three times your size. He could eat you without making a grimace. I pay your wages just the same. You shall be no loser."

"I wish to remain."

"Thou art an obstinate fool ! "

"I wish to remain ! "

"And if I dismiss you now, and tell you never to come back, never, never, never ! "

"In that case, of course, I must go. But my padrone will not dismiss a faithful servant. He is a just man. Agostino told me to keep his place warm. Ecco ! I have done so."

"Warm ! It's warm enough. It's likely to become red-hot," I interposed.

"You hear what the signore says ? "

"I hear ; and I reply that you are my kind friends, and you consider everything except my—honour."

If he had been Bertrand du Guesclin confronting Pedro the Cruel of Castille he could not have spoken with greater dignity or pride.

"Your—honour ? " said I, stupefied.

"Certainly. If I run away, everybody will say that I am afraid."

Gloriani's hair, worn à la Pompadour, positively bristled.

"Corpo di Bacco ! And aren't you ?"

"Not the least in the world. I am from Sicily."

"And he is from Sicily too. Va bene ! Be reasonable."

"It is impossible for me to run away."

Gloriani wiped the perspiration from his brow with a gesture of despair.

"Honour"—he declaimed the phrase—"is the last and greatest tyranny of civilization !"

"Gloriani," said I, "let us smoke one of your best together and discuss that phrase. We can do nothing with 'Lino. And, after all, he is safer here, amongst his friends, than elsewhere."

'Lino bowed.

"The signore is wise and kind and a man of honour. Shall I fetch the cigars ?"

Gloriani and I sat down. At midnight, and not till then, he would on rare occasions sit down in his own restaurant. We had hardly lighted our cigars when Stella came in, alone. She joined us and sat down.

"I am famished !"

"But, signorina, it is after hours."

"I can eat as your guest. Ecco ! Bartolomeo !"

She smiled upon him, openly, brazenly, and the audacious little wretch smiled back. At this interesting moment the husband entered.

How, you ask, did I know that he was the husband ?

To a man of any powers of observation, knowing what I I already knew, he could be nobody else. I divined exactly what had happened. He had waited for his wife at the stage-door ; she had eluded him ; he had followed her. When I add that he was precisely what we expected him to be—a big, coarse, swarthy brute—and that he came into the restaurant after midnight, with eyes gleaming and rolling like a man-eating tiger seeking his "kill," you will be inclined to give me small credit for any particular perspicacity. He padded up to his wife, stood still, crossed his huge arms, and stared at her.

"What do you want ?" said Gloriani.

"Who are you ?"

"I am the padrone of the restaurant. It is after hours. What do you want?"

"I want my wife," he said grimly.

Stella sprang to her feet. She faced him superbly.

"Yes," she cried in ringing tones, "this—this animal is my husband. I have paid him good money to keep away from me. How dare you come and disgrace me here? How dare you?"

"Ma che!" he growled. "I heard you were disgracing yourself. And so—I came. Now—march out with me, or I'll pull you out by the hair of the head!"

All this in Sicilian, with gestures and oaths untranslatable.

Stella never took her great eyes from his face. When he paused to gather breath, she said calmly: "I have not disgraced myself." Then she added, without a quiver: "Dear Gloriani, please send for the police!"

I could not help smiling at this ingenuous demand. Send for the police! A restaurateur, who prided himself upon the fact that his restaurant was one of the quietest in London, was invited to send for the police!

Gloriani, already on his feet, addressed the infuriated husband. I never admired the great man so much. He spoke naturally, almost genially, with a smile upon his lips, and his cigar between his fingers.

"Come, come," he murmured. "Is not all this a little unnecessary? I, too, am a married man. I know what is due to my wife; she knows what is due to me. These domestic matters should be arranged at home, not in restaurants!"

"Is she coming with me?"

"No," said Stella, stamping her foot. "Certainly not."

"I venture to suggest," continued Gloriani in the same mellifluous tones, "that the signore retires. I myself will escort the signora to her hotel. To-morrow, my friends, you will meet in a private room and discuss, amicably, the future."

I said, perhaps indiscreetly, "Bravo, Gloriani!"

"Why will you not come with me?" said the husband thickly. At first I had supposed that he was drunk; I perceived now, with clearer vision, that the man was sober, although hoarse with emotion and passion. I perceived also that he really loved his wife.

"I do not come with you," she said coldly, "because I



do not love you. I am honest. I refuse to live with a man I have ceased to love."

"You love somebody else?"

"Possibly. What then?"

You must try to realize the effect of these words upon an audience almost entirely composed of English people of the better class—of the class which strangles every emotional impulse, which, from the cradle to the grave, makes a fetish of "good form" and that particular manifestation of the unwritten law enjoining both man and woman to perish rather than exhibit passion in public.

"I have not been misinformed. You love a man in this restaurant."

Very slowly and deliberately his fierce glance wandered from face to face till it rested savagely upon the slender figure of poor 'Lino.

"It is—he!"

"Yes," said Stella.

Immediately the waiters closed round 'Lino. I breathed again. Then, to my dismay, I saw the boy wave them aside. He approached the man, glaring at him, and said, in his soft voice:

"It is time to speak very plainly. The signora pays me a great compliment in loving me. It is an honour of which I am sensible. And love is something which cannot be controlled. Ecco! It comes; it goes—pouf-f-f! Like the tramontana! The signora cannot help loving me. Ebbene! I do not love her."

The most astonished person present was undoubtedly Stella herself. Into her velvet eyes crept an expression too subtle to be interpreted. I read shame surely, and anger, and incredulity.

"You do not love me, Bartolomeo?"

Her wonderful pronunciation of his name would have been commended by the divine who brought tears to the eyes of the most hardened sinner whenever he murmured, "Mesopotamia!"

"I cannot help it, signora. I do not love you."

It is impossible for a Briton to forget his nationality. I felt that it rested with me to put an end to this un-English situation.

"'Lino," said I, very distinctly, and speaking in Italian, "is married."

A buzz of incredulity greeted my authoritative statement.

"I don't believe it," said Stella.

"It is true, signora. I am very happily married."

Lino spoke so simply, with a smile so disarming, so deprecating, that the same thought surged into the mind of every man present, Latin and Anglo-Saxon alike. We envied Lino and we envied his wife.

Stella's husband stretched out a vast arm and grasped the boy's shoulder, drawing the light, graceful figure close to his immense chest.

"You love your wife? Swear it, by the head of the Madonna and I will go—quietly."

Gloriani permitted himself the luxury of a smile. The police seemed far away. And then, to our horror and dismay, the wretched youth cried out pettishly: "Let me go! You are hurting my shoulder! Animal!"

"Swear!"

"No. This is an infamy."

Everybody began to talk at once. But above the chorus boomed the bass of the Sicilian: "Say it after me, 'By the head of the Madonna, I love my wife and nobody else.'"

"I do not love *your* wife, brutta bestia that you are! That is enough for you."

"Then, by God, I kill you here and now."

At that moment I saw that he carried a knife in his sleeve. The boy must have seen it also, for, in a different voice, he said nervously: "Ebbene! Let go, and I will swear."

With an oath the giant released him. The boy stood apart, the centre of a circle in which each face reflected faithfully, for once, at least, in a lifetime, its inmost feeling. Lino lifted his head, glanced at Stella, at Stella's husband, at Gloriani, and finally at me.

"The signore will understand," he said gently. "I swear by the head of the Blessed Madonna that I love truly and devotedly my—husband, Agostino, and, for his sake, I have tried to play the man. We were very, very poor, and Sicily is so far off. But I have earned the money which has saved his dear life."

As the words died away there was a silence that thrilled. And then from every throat burst a triumphant cheer, the thundering acclaim of those high qualities which link together all nations and all races—fidelity, loyalty, pluck, and love.

Gloriani flung his arms about the waiter's neck, and embraced her twice on each cheek. And then—mind you, this is a faithful transcript of life—perhaps the most amazing and appropriate thing of all took place. Stella rushed, sobbing, into the arms of her husband.

We left Gloriani's an hour later, after much champagne had been consumed at the padrone's expense. As we went out a fellow-Briton murmured to me : " Rum 'uns, these foreigners, eh ? " And I answered snappishly : " Not at all ! "

## HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

### *The Little Mermaid*

Hans Christian Andersen was the son of a Danish shoemaker, and showed such talent that the King of Denmark made special arrangements for his education. After much adverse criticism he was acknowledged as one of the greatest children's story-tellers in the world, and his fairy tales have been translated into many languages.



## THE LITTLE MERMAID

**F**AR out in the wide sea,—where the water is blue as the loveliest cornflower, and clear as the purest crystal, where it is so deep that very, very many church-towers must be heaped one upon another, in order to reach from the lowest depth to the surface above,—dwell the Mer-people.

Now you must not imagine that there is nothing but sand below the water : no, indeed, far from it ! Trees and plants of wondrous beauty grow there, whose stems and leaves are so light, that they are waved to and fro by the slightest motion of the water, almost as if they were living beings. Fishes, great and small, glide in and out among the branches, just as birds fly about among our trees.

Where the water is deepest, stands the palace of the Mer-king. The walls of this palace are of coral, and the high, pointed windows are of amber ; the roof, however, is composed of mussel-shells, which, as the billows pass over them, are continually opening and shutting. This looks exceedingly pretty, especially as each of these mussel-shells contains a number of bright, glittering pearls, one only of which would be the most costly ornament in the diadem of a king in the upper world.

The Mer-king who lived in this palace had been for many years a widower ; his old mother managed the household affairs for him. She was, on the whole, a sensible sort of a lady, although extremely proud of her high birth and station, on which account she wore twelve oysters on her tail, whilst the other inhabitants of the sea, even those of distinction, were allowed only six. In every other respect she merited unlimited praise, especially for the affection she showed to the six little princesses, her grand-daughters. These were all very beautiful children ; the youngest was, however, the most lovely ; her skin was as soft and delicate as a rose-leaf, her eyes were of as deep a blue as the sea, but like all

other mermaids, she had no feet, her body ended in a tail like that of a fish.

The whole day long the children used to play in the spacious apartments of the palace, where beautiful flowers grew out of the walls on all sides around them. When the great amber windows were opened, fishes would swim into these apartments as swallows fly into our rooms; but the fishes were bolder than the swallows, they swam straight up to the little princesses, ate from their hands, and allowed themselves to be caressed.

In front of the palace there was a large garden, full of fiery red and dark blue trees, whose fruit glittered like gold, and whose flowers resembled a bright, burning sun. The sand that formed the soil of the garden was of a bright, blue colour, something like flames of sulphur; and a strangely beautiful blue was spread over the whole, so that one might have fancied oneself raised very high in the air, with the sky at once above and below, certainly not at the bottom of the sea. When the waters were quite still, the sun might be seen looking like a purple flower, out of whose cup streamed forth the light of the world.

Each of the little princesses had her own plot in the garden, where she might plant and sow at her pleasure. One chose hers to be made in the shape of a whale, another preferred the figure of a mermaid, but the youngest had hers quite round like the sun, and planted in it only those flowers that were red, as the sun seemed to her. She was certainly a singular child, very quiet and thoughtful. Whilst her sisters were adorning themselves with all sorts of gay things that came out of a ship which had been wrecked, she asked for nothing but a beautiful white marble statue of a boy, which had been found in it. She put the statue in her garden, and planted a red weeping willow by its side. The tree grew up quickly, and let its long boughs fall upon the bright blue ground, where ever-moving shadows played in violet hues, as if boughs and root were embracing.

Nothing pleased the little princess more than to hear about the world of human beings living above the sea. She made her old grandmother tell her everything she knew about ships, towns, men, and land animals, and was particularly pleased when she heard that the flowers of the upper world had a pleasant fragrance (for the flowers of the sea are scent-

ness), and that the woods were green, and the fishes fluttering among the branches of various gay colours, and that they could sing with a loud clear voice. The old lady meant birds, but she called them fishes, because her grandchildren, having never seen a bird, would not otherwise have understood her.

"When you have attained your fifteenth year," added she, "you will be permitted to rise to the surface of the sea; you will then sit by moonlight in the clefts of the rocks, see the ships sail by, and learn to distinguish towns and men."

The next year the eldest of the sisters reached this happy age, but the others—alas! the second sister was a year younger than the eldest, the third a year younger than the second and so on; the youngest had still five whole years to wait till that joyful time should come when she also might rise to the surface of the water and see what was going on in the upper world; however, the eldest promised to tell the others of everything she might see, when the first day of her being of age arrived; for the grandmother gave them but little information, and there was so much that they wished to hear.

But none of all the sisters longed so ardently for the day when she should be released from childish restraint as the youngest, she who had longest to wait, and was so quiet and thoughtful. Many a night she stood by the open windows, looking up through the clear blue water, whilst the fishes were leaping and playing around her. She could see the sun and the moon; their light was pale, but they appeared larger than they do to those who live in the upper world. If a shadow passed over them, she knew it must be either a whale or a ship sailing by full of human beings, who indeed little thought that, far beneath them, a little mermaiden was passionately stretching forth her white hands towards their ship's keel.

The day had now arrived when the eldest princess had attained her fifteenth year, and was therefore allowed to rise up to the surface of the sea.

When she returned she had a thousand things to relate. Her chief pleasure had been to sit upon a sandbank in the moonlight, looking at the large town which lay on the coast, where lights were beaming like stars, and where music was playing; she had heard the distant noise of men and carriages, she had seen the high church-towers, had listened to the



ringing of the bells ; and just because she could not go there she longed the more after all these things.

How attentively did her youngest sister listen to her words ! And when she next stood at night time, by her open window, gazing upward through the blue waters, she thought so intensely of the great noisy city that she fancied she could hear the church-bells ringing.

Next year the second sister received permission to swim wherever she pleased. She rose to the surface of the sea, just when the sun was setting ; and this sight so delighted her, that she declared it to be more beautiful than anything else she had seen above the waters.

"The whole sky seemed tinged with gold," said she, "and it is impossible for me to describe to you the beauty of the clouds. Now red, now violet, they glided over me ; but still more swiftly flew over the water a flock of white swans, just where the sun was descending ; I looked after them, but the sun disappeared, and the bright rosy light on the surface of the sea and on the edges of the clouds was gradually extinguished."

It was now time for the third sister to visit the upper world. She was the boldest of the six, and ventured up a river. On its shores she saw green hills covered with woods and vineyards, from among which arose houses and castles ; she heard the birds singing, and the sun shone with so much power, that she was continually obliged to plunge below, in order to cool her burning face. In a little bay she met with a number of children, who were bathing and jumping about ; she would have joined in their gambols, but the children fled back to land in great terror, and a little black animal barked at her in such a manner that she herself was frightened at last, and swam back to the sea. She could not, however, forget the green woods, the verdant hills, and the pretty children, who, although they had no fins, were swimming about in the river so fearlessly.

The fourth sister was not so bold, she remained in the open sea, and said on her return home, she thought nothing could be more beautiful. She had seen ships sailing by, so far off that they looked like seagulls, she had watched the merry dolphins gambolling in the water, and the enormous whales, sending up into the air a thousand sparkling fountains.

The year after, the fifth sister attained her fifteenth year.

Her birthday happened at a different season to that of her sisters ; it was winter, the sea was of a green colour, and immense icebergs were floating on its surface. These, she said, looked like pearls ; they were, however, much larger than the church-towers in the land of human beings. She sat down upon one of these pearls, and let the wind play with her long hair, but then all the ships hoisted their sails in terror, and escaped as quickly as possible. In the evening the sea was covered with sails ; and whilst the great mountains of ice alternately sank and rose again, and beamed with a reddish glow, flashes of lightning burst forth from the clouds and the thunder rolled on, peal after peal. The sails of all the ships were instantly furled, and horror and affright reigned on board, but the princess sat still on the iceberg, looking unconcernedly at the blue zig-zag of the flashes.

The first time that either of these sisters rose out of the sea, she was quite enchanted at the sight of so many new and beautiful objects, but the novelty was soon over, and it was not long ere their own home appeared more attractive than the upper world, for there only did they find everything agreeable.

Many an evening would the five sisters rise hand in hand from the depths of the ocean. Their voices were far sweeter than any human voice, and when a storm was coming on, they would swim in front of the ships, and sing,—oh ! how sweetly did they sing ! describing the happiness of those who lived at the bottom of the sea, and entreating the sailors not to be afraid, but to come down to them.

The mariners, however, did not understand their words ; they fancied the song was only the whistling of the wind, and thus they lost the hidden glories of the sea ; for if their ships were wrecked, all on board were drowned, and none but dead men ever entered the Mer-king's palace.

Whilst the sisters were swimming at evening time, the youngest would remain motionless and alone, in her father's palace, looking up after them. She would have wept, but mermaids cannot weep, and therefore, when they are troubled, suffer infinitely more than human beings do.

"Oh ! if I were but fifteen !" sighed she, "I know that I should love the upper world and its inhabitants so much."

At last the time she had so longed for arrived.

"Well, now it is your turn," said the grandmother, "come

here that I may adorn you like your sisters." And she wound around her hair a wreath of white lilies, whose every petal was the half of a pearl, and then commanded eight large oysters to fasten themselves to the princess's tail, in token of her high rank.

"But that is so very uncomfortable!" said the little princess.

"One must not mind slight inconveniences when one wishes to look well," said the old lady.

How willingly would the princess have given up all this splendour, and exchanged her heavy crown for the red flowers of her garden, which were so much more becoming to her. But she dared not do so. "Farewell," said she; and she rose from the sea, light as a flake of foam.

When, for the first time in her life, she appeared on the surface of the water, the sun had just sunk below the horizon, the clouds were beaming with bright golden and rosy hues, the evening star was shining in the pale western sky, the air was mild and refreshing, and the sea as smooth as a looking-glass. A large ship with three masts lay on the still waters; one sail only was unfurled, but not a breath was stirring, and the sailors were quietly seated on the cordage and ladders of the vessel. Music and song resounded from the deck, and after it grew dark hundreds of lamps all of a sudden burst forth into light, whilst innumerable flags were fluttering overhead. The little mermaid swam close up to the captain's cabin, and every now and then when the ship was raised by the motion of the water, she could look through the clear window panes. She saw within, many richly dressed men; the handsomest among them was a young prince with large black eyes. He could not certainly be more than sixteen years old, and it was in honour of his birthday that a grand festival was being celebrated. The crew were dancing on the deck, and when the young prince appeared among them, a hundred rockets were sent up into the air, turning night into day, and so terrifying the little mermaid, that for some minutes she plunged beneath the water. However, she soon raised her little head again, and then it seemed as if all the stars were falling down upon her. Such a fiery shower she had never seen before, never had she heard that men possessed such wonderful powers. Large suns revolved around her, bright fishes swam in the air, and everything was reflected

perfectly on the clear surface of the sea. It was so light in the ship, that everything could be seen distinctly. Oh! how happy the young prince was! he shook hands with the sailors, laughed and jested with them, whilst sweet notes of music mingled with the silence of night.

It was now late, but the little mermaid could not tear herself away from the ship and the handsome young prince. She remained looking through the cabin window, rocked to and fro by the waves. There was a foaming and fermentation in the depths beneath, and the ship began to move on faster, the sails were spread, the waves rose high, thick clouds gathered over the sky, and the noise of distant thunder was heard. The sailors perceived that a storm was coming on, so they again furled the sails. The great vessel was tossed about on the tempestuous ocean like a light boat, and the waves rose to an immense height, towering over the ship, which alternately sank beneath and rose above them. To the little mermaid this seemed most delightful, but the ship's crew thought very differently. The vessel cracked, the stout masts bent under the violence of the billows, the waters rushed in. For a minute the ship tottered to and fro, then the main-mast broke, as if it had been a reed; the ship turned over, and was filled with water. The little mermaid now perceived that the crew was in danger, for she herself was forced to beware of the beams and splinters torn from the vessel, and floating about on the waves. But at the same time it became pitch dark so that she could not distinguish anything; presently, however, a dreadful flash of lightning disclosed to her the whole of the wreck. Her eyes sought the young prince—the same instant the ship sank to the bottom. At first she was delighted, thinking that the prince must now come to her abode, but she soon remembered that man cannot live in water, and that therefore if the prince ever entered the palace, it would be as a corpse.

"Die! no, he must not die!" She swam through the fragments with which the water was strewn regardless of the danger she was incurring, and at last found the prince all but exhausted, and with great difficulty keeping his head above water. He had already closed his eyes, and must inevitably have been drowned, had not the little mermaid come to his rescue. She seized hold of him and kept him above water, suffering the current to bear them on together.

Towards morning the storm was hushed ; no trace, however, remained of the ship. The sun rose like fire out of the sea ; his beams seemed to restore colour to the prince's cheeks, but his eyes were still closed. The mermaid kissed his high forehead and stroked his wet hair away from his face. He looked like the marble statue in her garden ; she kissed him again and wished most fervently that he might recover.

She now saw the dry land with its mountains glittering with snow. A green wood extended along the coast, and at the entrance of the wood stood a chapel or convent, she could not be sure which. Citron and lemon trees grew in the garden adjoining it, an avenue of tall palm trees led up to the door. The sea here formed a little bay, in which the water was quite smooth but very deep, and under the cliffs there were dry firm sands. Hither swam the little mermaid with the seemingly dead prince ; she laid him upon the warm sand, and took care to place his head high, and to turn his face to the sun.

The bells began to ring in the large white building which stood before her, and a number of young girls came out to walk in the garden. The mermaid went away from the shore, hid herself behind some stones, covered her head with foam, so that her little face could not be seen, and watched the prince with unremitting attention.

It was not long before one of the young girls approached. She seemed quite frightened at finding the prince in this state, apparently dead ; soon, however, she recovered herself, and ran back to call her sisters. The little mermaid saw that the prince revived, and that all around smiled kindly and joyfully upon him—for her, however, she looked not, he knew not that it was she who had saved him, and when the prince was taken into the house, she felt so sad, that she immediately plunged beneath the water, and returned to her father's palace.

If she had been before quiet and thoughtful, she now grew still more so. Her sisters asked her what she had seen in the upper world, but she made no answer.

Many an evening she rose to the place where she had left the prince. She saw the snow on the mountains melt, the fruits in the garden ripen and gathered, but the prince she never saw, so she always returned sorrowfully to her subterranean abode. Her only pleasure was to sit in her little

garden gazing on the beautiful statue so like the prince. She cared no longer for her flowers; they grew up in wild luxuriance, covered the steps, and entwined their long stems and tendrils among the boughs of the trees, so that her whole garden became a bower.

At last, being unable to conceal her sorrow any longer, she revealed the secret to one of her sisters, who told it to the other princesses, and they to some of their friends. Among them was a young mermaid who recollected the prince, having been an eye-witness herself to the festivities in the ship; she knew also in what country the prince lived, and the name of its king.

"Come, little sister!" said the princesses, and embracing her they rose together arm in arm, out of the water, just in front of the prince's palace.

This palace was built of bright yellow stones, a flight of white marble steps led down from it to the sea. A gilded cupola crowned the building, and white marble figures, which might almost have been taken for real men and women, were placed among the pillars surrounding it. Through the clear glass of the high windows one might look into magnificent apartments hung with silken curtains, the walls adorned with magnificent paintings. It was a real treat to the little royal mermaids to behold so splendid an abode; they gazed through the windows of one of the largest rooms, and in the centre saw a fountain playing, whose waters sprang up so high as to reach the glittering cupola above, through which the sunbeams fell dancing on the water, and brightening the pretty plants which grew around it.

The little mermaid now knew where her beloved prince dwelt, and henceforth she went there almost every evening. She often approached nearer the land than her sisters had ventured, and even swam up the narrow channel that flowed under the marble balcony. Here on a bright moonlight night she would watch the young prince, who believed himself alone.

Sometimes she saw him sailing on the water in a gaily-painted boat with many coloured flags waving above. She would then hide among the green reeds which grew on the banks, listening to his voice, and if any one in the boat noticed the rustling of her long silver veil, which was caught now and then by the light breeze, they only fancied it was a swan flapping his wings.

Many a night when the fishermen were casting their nets by the beacon's light, she heard them talking of the prince, and relating the noble actions he had performed. She was then so

happy, thinking how she had saved his life when struggling with the waves, and remembering how his head had rested on her bosom, and how she had kissed him when he knew nothing of it, and could never even dream of such a thing.

Human beings became more and more dear to her every day; she wished that she were one of them. Their world seemed to her much larger than that of the mer-people; they could fly over the ocean in their ships, as well as climb to the summits of those high mountains that rose above the clouds; and their wooded domains extended much farther than a mermaid's eye could penetrate.

There were many things that she wished to hear explained, but her sisters could not give her any satisfactory answer; she was again obliged to have recourse to the old queen-mother, who knew a great deal about the upper world, which she used to call "the country above the sea."

"Do men when they are not drowned live for ever?" she asked one day. "Do not they die as we do, who live at the bottom of the sea?"

"Yes," was the grandmother's reply, "they must die like us, and their life is much shorter than ours. We live to the age of three hundred years, but when we die, we become foam on the sea, and are not allowed even to share a grave among those that are dear to us. We have no immortal souls, we can never live again, and are like the grass which, when once cut down, is withered for ever. Human beings, on the contrary, have souls that continue to live, when their bodies become dust, and as we rise out of the water to admire the abode of man, they ascend to glorious unknown dwellings in the skies which we are not permitted to see."

"Why have not *we* immortal souls?" asked the little mermaid. "I would willingly give up my three hundred years to be a human being for only one day, thus to become entitled to that heavenly world above."

"You must not think of that," answered her grandmother; "it is much better as it is; we live longer and are far happier than human beings."

"So I must die, and be dashed like foam over the sea, never to rise again and hear the gentle murmur of the ocean, never again see the beautiful flowers and the bright sun! Tell me, dear grandmother, are there no means by which I may obtain an immortal soul?"

"No!" replied the old lady. "It is true that if thou couldst so win the affections of a human being as to become dearer to him than either father or mother; if he loved thee with all his heart, and promised whilst the priest joined his hands with thine to be always faithful to thee; then his soul would flow into thine, and thou wouldst then become partaker of human bliss. But that can never be! for what in our eyes is the most beautiful part of our body, the tail, the inhabitants of the earth think hideous, they cannot bear it. To appear handsome to them, the body must have two clumsy props which they call legs."

The little mermaid sighed and looked mournfully at the scaly part of her form, otherwise so fair and delicate.

"We are happy," added the old lady, "we shall jump and swim about merrily for three hundred years; that is a long time, and afterwards we shall repose peacefully in death. This evening we have a court ball."

The ball which the queen-mother spoke of was far more splendid than any that earth has ever seen. The walls of the saloon were of crystal, very thick, but yet very clear; hundreds of large mussel-shells were planted in rows along them; these shells were some of rose-colour, some green as grass, but all sending forth a bright light, which not only illuminated the whole apartment, but also shone through the glassy walls so as to light up the waters around for a great space, and making the scales of the numberless fishes, great and small, crimson and purple, silver and gold-coloured, appear more brilliant than ever.

Through the centre of the saloon flowed a bright, clear stream, on the surface of which danced mermen and mermaids to the melody of their own sweet voices, voices far sweeter than those of the dwellers upon earth. The little princess sang more harmoniously than any other, and they clapped their hands and applauded her. She was pleased at this, for she knew well that there was neither on earth nor in the sea a more beautiful voice than hers. But her thoughts soon returned to the world above her; she could not forget the handsome prince; she could not control her sorrow at not having an immortal soul. She stole away from her father's palace, and whilst all was joy within, she sat alone lost in thought in her little neglected garden. On a sudden she heard the tones of horns resounding over the water far away in the distance, and she said to herself, "Now he is going out to hunt, he whom I love more than my father and my mother, with whom my thoughts are constantly occupied,



and to whom I would so willingly trust the happiness of my life! All! all, will I risk to win him—and an immortal soul! Whilst my sisters are still dancing in the palace, I will go to the enchantress whom I have hitherto feared so much, but who is, nevertheless, the only person who can advise and help me.”

So the little mermaid left the garden, and went to the foaming whirlpool beyond which dwelt the enchantress. She had never been this way before—neither flowers nor sea-grass bloomed along her path; she had to traverse an extent of bare grey sand till she reached the whirlpool, whose waters were eddying and whizzing like mill-wheels, tearing everything they could seize along with them into the abyss below. She was obliged to make her way through this horrible place, in order to arrive at the territory of the enchantress. Then she had to pass through a boiling, slimy bog, which the enchantress called her turf-moor: her house stood in a wood beyond this, and a strange abode it was. All the trees and bushes around were polypi, looking like hundred-headed serpents shooting up out of the ground; their branches were long slimy arms with fingers of worms, every member, from the root to the uttermost tip, ceaselessly moving and extending on all sides. Whatever they seized they fastened upon so that it could not loosen itself from their grasp. The little mermaid stood still for a minute, looking at this horrible wood; her heart beat with fear, and she would certainly have returned without attaining her object, had she not remembered the prince—and immortality. The thought gave her new courage, she bound up her long waving hair, that the polypi might not catch hold of it, crossed her delicate arms over her bosom, and, swifter than a fish can glide through the water, she passed these unseemly trees, who stretched their eager arms after her in vain. She could not, however, help seeing that every polypus had something in his grasp, held as firmly by a thousand little arms as if enclosed by iron bands. The whitened skeletons of a number of human beings who had been drowned in the sea, and had sunk into the abyss, grinned horribly from the arms of these polypi; helmets, chests, skeletons of land animals were also held in their embrace; among other things might be seen even a little mermaid whom they had seized and strangled! What a fearful sight for the unfortunate princess!

But she got safely through this wood of horrors and then

arrived at a slimy place, where immense fat snails were crawling about, and in the midst of this place stood a house built of the bones of unfortunate people who had been shipwrecked. Here sat the witch caressing a toad in the same manner as some persons would a pet bird. The ugly fat snails she called her chickens, and she permitted them to crawl about her.

"I know well what you would ask of me," said she to the little princess. "Your wish is foolish enough, yet it shall be fulfilled, though its accomplishment is sure to bring misfortune on you, my fairest princess. You wish to get rid of your tail, and to have instead two stilts like those of human beings, in order that a young prince may fall in love with you, and that you may obtain an immortal soul. Is it not so?" Whilst the witch spoke these words, she laughed so violently that her pet toad and snails fell from her lap.

"You come just at the right time" continued she; "had you come after sunset, it would not have been in my power to have helped you before another year. I will prepare for you a drink with which you must swim to land, you must sit down upon the shore and swallow it, and then your tail will fall and shrink up to the things which men call legs. This transformation will, however, be very painful; you will feel as though a sharp knife passed through your body. All who look on you after you have been thus changed will say that you are the loveliest child of earth they have ever seen; you will retain your peculiar undulating movements and no dancer will move so lightly, but every step you take will cause you pain all but unbearable; it will seem to you as though you were walking on the sharp edges of swords, and your blood will flow. Can you endure all this suffering? If so, I will grant your request."

"Yes, I will," answered the princess, with a faltering voice; for she remembered her dear prince, and the immortal soul which her suffering might win.

"Only consider," said the witch, "that you can never again become a mermaid, when once you have received a human form. You may never return to your sisters, and your father's palace; and unless you shall win the prince's love to such a degree, that he shall leave father and mother for you, that you shall be mixed up with all his thoughts and wishes, and unless the priest join your hands, so that you

become man and wife, you will never obtain the immortality you seek. The morrow of the day on which he is united to another, will see your death; your heart will break with sorrow, and you will be changed to foam on the sea."

"Still I will venture!" said the little mermaid, pale and trembling as a dying person.

"Besides all this, I must be paid, and it is no slight thing that I require for my trouble. Thou hast the sweetest voice of all the dwellers in the sea, and thou thinkest by its means to charm the prince; this voice, however, I demand as my recompense. The best thing thou possessest I require in exchange for my magic drink; for I shall be obliged to sacrifice my own blood, in order to give it the sharpness of a two-edged sword."

"But if you take my voice from me," said the princess, "what have I left with which to charm the prince?"

"Thy graceful form," replied the witch, "thy modest gait, and speaking eyes. With such as these, it will be easy to infatuate a vain human heart. Well now! hast thou lost courage? Put out thy little tongue, that I may cut it off, and take it for myself, in return for my magic drink."

"Be it so!" said the princess, and the witch took up her cauldron, in order to mix her potion. "Cleanliness is a good thing," remarked she, as she began to rub the cauldron with a handful of toads and snails. She then scratched her bosom, and let the black blood trickle down into the cauldron every moment throwing in new ingredients, the smoke from the mixture assuming such horrible forms as were enough to fill beholders with terror, and a moaning and groaning proceeding from it, which might be compared to the weeping of crocodiles. The magic drink at length became clear and transparent as pure water; it was ready.

"Here it is!" said the witch to the princess, cutting out her tongue at the same moment. The poor little mermaid was now dumb: she could neither sing nor speak.

"If the polypi should attempt to seize you, as you pass through my little grove," said the witch, "you have only to sprinkle some of this magic drink over them, and their arms will burst into a thousand pieces." But the princess had no need of this counsel, for the polypi drew hastily back as soon as they perceived the bright phial, that glittered in her hand like a star; thus she passed safely through the

formidable wood over the moor, and across the foaming mill-stream.

She now looked once again at her father's palace; the lamps in the saloon were extinguished, and all the family were asleep. She would not go in, for she could not speak if she did; she was about to leave her home for ever; her heart was ready to break with sorrow at the thought; she stole into the garden, plucked a flower from the bed of each of her sisters as a remembrance, kissed her hand again and again, and then rose through the dark blue waters to the world above.

The sun had not yet risen, when she arrived at the prince's dwelling, and ascended those well-known marble steps. The moon still shone in the sky when the little mermaid drank off the wonderful liquid contained in her phial, she felt it run through her like a sharp knife, and she fell down in a swoon. When the sun rose, she awoke; and felt a burning pain in all her limbs, but—she saw standing close to her the object of her love, the handsome young prince, whose coal-black eyes were fixed inquiringly upon her. Full of shame she cast down her own, and perceived, instead of the long fish-tail she had hitherto borne, two slender legs; but she was quite naked, and tried in vain to cover herself with her long thick hair. The prince asked who she was, and how she had got there; and she, in reply, smiled and gazed upon him with her bright blue eyes, for alas! she could not speak. He then led her by the hand into the palace. She found that the witch had told her true; she felt as though she were walking on the edges of sharp swords, but she bore the pain willingly; on she passed, light as a zephyr, and all who saw her, wondered at her light undulating movements.

When she entered the palace, rich clothes of muslin and silk were brought to her; she was lovelier than all who dwelt there, but she could neither speak nor sing. Some female slaves, gaily dressed in silk and gold brocade, sung before the prince and his royal parents; and one of them distinguished herself by her clear sweet voice, which the prince applauded by clapping his hands. This made the little mermaid very sad, for she knew that she used to sing far better than the young slave. "Alas!" thought she, "if he did but know that, for his sake, I have given away my voice for ever."

The slaves began to dance; our lovely little mermaid then arose, stretched out her delicate white arms, and hovered gracefully about the room. Every motion displayed more and more the perfect symmetry and elegance of her figure; and the expression which beamed in her speaking eyes touched the hearts of the spectators far more than the song of the slaves.

All present were enchanted, but especially the young prince, who called her his dear little foundling. And she danced again and again, although every step cost her excessive pain. The prince then said she should always be with him; and accordingly a sleeping palace was prepared for her on velvet cushions in the anteroom of his own apartment.

The prince caused a suit of male apparel to be made for her, in order that she might accompany him in his rides; so together they traversed the fragrant woods, where green boughs brushed against their shoulders, and the birds sang merrily among the fresh leaves. With him she climbed up steep mountains, and although her tender feet bled, so as to be remarked by the attendants, she only smiled, and followed her dear prince to the heights, whence they could see the clouds chasing each other beneath them, like a flock of birds migrating to other countries.

During the night, she would, when all in the palace were at rest, walk down the marble steps, in order to cool her feet in the deep waters; she would then think of those beloved ones, who dwelt in the lower world.

One night, as she was thus bathing her feet, her sisters swam together to the spot, arm in arm and singing, but alas! so mournfully! She beckoned to them, and they immediately recognised her, and told her how great was the mourning in her father's house for her loss. From this time the sisters visited her every night; and once they brought with them the old grandmother, who had not seen the upper world for a great many years; they likewise brought their father, the Mer-king, with his crown on his head; but these two old people did not venture near enough to land to be able to speak to her.

The little mermaid became dearer and dearer to the prince every day; but he only looked upon her as a sweet, gentle child; and the thought of making her his wife never entered his head. And yet his wife she must be, ere she could receive an immortal soul; his wife she must be, or

she would change into foam, and be driven restlessly over the billows of the sea !

"Dost thou not love me above all others ?" her eyes seemed to ask, as he pressed her fondly in his arms, and kissed her lovely brow.

"Yes," the prince would say, "thou art dearer to me than any other, for no one is as good as thou art ! Thou lovest me so much ; and thou art so like a young maiden, whom I have seen but once, and may never see again. I was on board a ship, which was wrecked by a sudden tempest ; the waves threw me on the shore, near a holy temple, where a number of young girls are occupied constantly with religious services. The youngest of them found me on the shore, and saved my life. I saw her only once, but her image is vividly impressed upon my memory, and her alone can I love. But she belongs to the holy temple ; and thou who resemblest her so much hast been given to me for consolation ; never will we be parted !"

"Alas ! he does not know that it was I who saved his life," thought the little mermaiden, sighing deeply ; "I bore him over the wild waves, into the wooded bay, where the holy temple stood ; I sat behind the rocks, waiting till someone should come. I saw the pretty maiden approach, whom he loves more than me,"—and again she heaved a deep sigh, for she could not weep—"he said that the young girl belongs to the holy temple ; she never comes out into the world, so they cannot meet each other again, and I am always with him, see him daily ; I will love him, and devote my whole life to him."

"So the prince is going to be married to the beautiful daughter of the neighbouring king," said the courtiers, "that is why he is having that splendid ship fitted out. It is announced that he wishes to travel, but in reality he goes to see the princess ; a numerous retinue will accompany him." The little mermaiden smiled at these and similar conjectures, for she knew the prince's intentions better than any one else.

"I must go," he said to her, "I must see the beautiful princess ; my parents require me to do so ; but they will not compel me to marry her, and bring her home as my bride. And it is quite impossible for me to love her, for she cannot be so like the beautiful girl in the temple as thou art ; and if I were obliged to choose, I should prefer thee, my little

silent foundling, with the speaking eyes." And he kissed her rosy lips, played with her locks, and folded her in his arms, whereupon arose in her heart a sweet vision of human happiness and immortal bliss.

"Thou art not afraid of the sea, art thou, my sweet silent child?" asked he tenderly as they stood together in the splendid ship, which was to take them to the country of the neighbouring king. And then he told her of the storms that sometimes agitate the waters; of the strange fishes that inhabit the deep, and of the wonderful things seen by divers. But she smiled at his words, for she knew better than any child of earth what went on in the depths of the ocean.

At night time, when the moon shone brightly, and when all on board were fast asleep, she sat in the ship's gallery, looking down into the sea. It seemed to her, as she gazed through the foamy track made by the ship's keel, that she saw her father's palace, and her grandmother's silver crown. She then saw her sisters rise out of the water, looking sorrowful and stretching out their hands towards her. She nodded to them, smiled, and would have explained that everything was going on quite according to her wishes; but just then the cabin boy approached, upon which the sisters plunged beneath the water so suddenly that the boy thought what he had seen on the waves was nothing but foam.

The next morning the ship entered the harbour of the king's splendid capital. Bells were rung, trumpets sounded, and soldiers marched in procession through the city, with waving banners, and glittering bayonets. Every day witnessed some new entertainments, balls and parties followed each other; the princess, however, was not yet in the town; she had been sent to a distant convent for education, and had there been taught the practice of all royal virtues. At last she arrived at the palace.

The little mermaid had been anxious to see this unparalleled princess; and she was now obliged to confess, that she had never before seen so beautiful a creature.

The skin of the princess was so white and delicate, that the veins might be seen through it, and her dark eyes sparkled beneath a pair of finely formed eye-brows.

"It is herself!" exclaimed the prince, when they met, "it is she who saved my life, when I lay like a corpse on the sea-shore!" and he pressed his blushing bride to his beating heart.

“ Oh, I am all too happy ! ” said he to his dumb foundling. “ What I never dared to hope for, has come to pass. Thou must rejoice in my happiness, for thou lovest me more than all others who surround me.” And the little mermaid kissed his hand in silent sorrow ; it seemed to her as if her heart was breaking already, although the morrow of his marriage day, which must inevitably see her death, had not yet dawned.

Again rung the church-bells, whilst heralds rode through the streets of the capital, to announce the approaching bridal. Odorous flames burned in silver candlesticks on all the altars ; the priests swung their golden censers ; and bride and bridegroom joined hands, whilst the holy words that united them were spoken. The little mermaid, clad in silk and cloth of gold, stood behind the princess, and held the train of the bridal dress ; but her ear heard nothing of the solemn music ; her eyes saw not the holy ceremony ; she remembered her approaching end, she remembered that she had lost both this world and the next.

That very same evening bride and bridegroom went on board the ship ; cannons were fired, flags waved with the breeze, and in the centre of the deck stood a magnificent pavilion of purple and cloth of gold, fitted up with the richest and softest couches. Here the princely pair were to spend the night. A favourable wind swelled the sails, and the ship glided lightly over the blue waters.

As soon as it was dark, coloured lamps were hung out and dancing began on the deck. The little mermaid was thus involuntarily reminded of what she had seen the first time she rose to the upper world. The spectacle that now presented itself was equally splendid—and she was obliged to join in the dance, hovering lightly as a bird over the ship boards. All applauded her, for never had she danced with more enchanting grace. Her little feet suffered extremely, but she no longer felt the pain ; the anguish her heart suffered was much greater. It was the last evening she might see him, for whose sake she had forsaken her home and all her family, had given away her beautiful voice, and suffered daily the most violent pain—all without his having the least suspicion of it. It was the last evening that she might breathe the same atmosphere in which he, the beloved one, lived ; the last evening when she might behold the deep blue sea, and the starry heavens—an eternal night, in which she might



neither think nor dream, awaited her. And all was joy in the ship ; and she, her heart filled with thoughts of death and annihilation, smiled and danced with the others, till past midnight. Then the prince kissed his lovely bride, and arm in arm they entered the magnificent tent, prepared for their repose.

All was now still ; the steersman alone stood at the ship's helm. The little mermaid leaned her white arms on the gallery, and looked towards the east, watching for the dawn ; she well knew that the first sunbeam would witness her dissolution. She saw her sisters rise out of the sea ; deadly pale were their features ; and their long hair no more fluttered over their shoulders, it had all been cut off.

"We have given it to the witch," said they, "to induce her to help thee, so that thou mayest not die. She has given to us a pen-knife : here it is ! before the sun rises, thou must plunge it into the prince's heart ; and when his warm blood trickles down upon thy feet they will gain be changed to a fish-like tail ; thou wilt once more become a mermaid, and wilt live thy full three hundred years, ere thou changest to foam on the sea. But hasten ! either he or thou must die before sun-rise. Our aged mother mourns for thee so much, her grey hair has fallen off through sorrow, as ours fell before the scissors of the witch. Kill the prince, and come down to us ! hasten ! hasten ! dost thou not see the red streaks on the eastern sky, announcing the near approach of the sun ? A few minutes more and he rises, and then all will be over with thee." At these words they sighed deeply and vanished.

The little mermaid drew aside the purple curtains of the pavilion, where lay the bride and bridegroom ; bending over them, she kissed the prince's forehead, and then glancing at the sky, she saw that the dawning light became every moment brighter ; the prince's lips unconsciously murmured the name of his bride—he was dreaming of her, and her only, whilst the fatal penknife trembled in the hand of the unhappy mermaid. All at once, she threw far out into the sea that instrument of death ; the waves rose like blazing flames around, and the water where it fell seemed tinged with blood. With eyes fast becoming dim and fixed, she looked once more at her beloved prince ; then plunged from the ship into the sea, and felt her body slowly but surely dissolving into foam.

## RICHMAL CROMPTON

### *She Saw the Joke*

Richmal Crompton (Miss R. C. Lamburn) was a schoolmistress for some years and has written a large number of novels and stories. Her most amusing studies of the small boy *William* have proved immensely popular, and have already run into fifteen volumes.



## SHE SAW THE JOKE

JENNIE first met Harold Marston when she was eighteen and Harold was twenty-one. They were clerks in the same firm. Jennie was a serious little person, short and rather stocky, with big dark eyes and dark curly hair. She just escaped prettiness somehow, and, if you ever troubled to wonder why this was, you came to the conclusion that it was because she took herself so seriously. She took herself too seriously even to choose the sort of clothes that suited her or to make the most of the dark eyes and dark curly hair that were her chief beauties. And, of course, once she had met Harold Marston, she took herself even more seriously. Or rather, she took Harold seriously, and that left her no time to think about herself at all.

Harold was one of those earnest young men who go to night classes and take courses in business methods and salesmanship after office hours. He was quite an ordinary-looking man, with a pale face, a long sharp nose, and a slightly receding chin. You thought it was a weak face till you noticed the gimlet eyes behind the round glasses and the tight-determined little mouth. His pallor, his stoop, and the slightness of his frame gave him a wistful and neglected air that attracted Jennie long before he was aware of her existence. By the time she had discovered that he was neither wistful nor neglected, he had bound her firmly to him by the chains of his ambition. His ambition fascinated and thrilled her. He meant to be a financial magnate, a "king" in the world of commerce. He found nothing incongruous in talking to her about this as they walked home from the office—she to a small stuffy and one-room flatlet in a somewhat dingy Ladies' Residential Club, he to the "bed-sitting room for single gent," that was the best he could afford from his two pound a week wages. Jennie never had the least doubt that he would succeed. It was her faith in him, of course, that was her main attraction for him.

When he had learnt all that his evening and correspondence courses could teach him, he took the first tentative step upon his self-ordained path. He circularised the small confectioners in the neighbourhood, offering confectionery at cut-throat prices. He would fetch this from the manufacturers himself and deliver it in a motor-cycle with a roomy side-car after office hours. The prices at which he offered it gave him the barest margin of profit and would not have covered extra rent or wages, but fortunately neither of these was necessary. His "connection" was so small that he could keep the "stock" in his bed-sitting room, and Jennie did all his book-keeping. They would leave the office together, hurry to his room, and set to work at once—he delivering the boxes of confectionery, she keeping the books and typing the circulars. They were often busy till midnight, and they worked all the week-end as a matter of course. Though ambitious, there was nothing reckless about him, and he did not intend to give up his job at the office till he had got together a large enough connection fully to justify it. By this time, of course, there was an "understanding" between him and Jennie—not a definite engagement, but somehow more binding than a definite engagement. They were to be married as soon as his means permitted it. He asked her not to tell anyone about the "understanding." There was an odd secretive vein in his nature, and he hated people knowing about his affairs.

"There'd only be a lot of stupid jokes about it at the office," he said, "and after all the less we have to do with those people the better."

Certainly he did not leave her time to have much to do with anyone or anything beside himself and his underground but rapidly growing business. Sometimes she thought that she would rather have liked to have other friends. There were several quite nice boys and girls who made overtures to her, but she did not accept them. Friendship with them would have meant forgathering with them after office hours, evenings at the pictures, suppers at jolly little Soho restaurants. And she had no time for it. One boy in particular, called Jimmie Wrigram—a jolly boy with untidy curly hair, blue eyes, blunt nose, and lips that were always curved into a friendly humorous grin—used to waylay her as she was hurrying to and from the office.

"Where's the hurry?" he would tease her. "Why do you look so solemn? I don't think I've ever seen you laugh yet. Can't you see a joke? Look here. I'll teach you. Come out with me this evening and I'll teach you to see a joke. I promise I will. Come on—do!"

But she would hurry on with her faint grave smile, saying: "No, I'm afraid I can't, Mr. Wrigram. I'm busy to-night."

"But you can't be busy every night. What about to-morrow?"

"I'm afraid I am busy every night."

The others gradually learnt to leave her alone, calling her "standoffish" and "stuck up," but Jimmie Wrigram never did. He was always hanging about ready to tease her.

"You haven't let me teach you to see a joke yet. What about it? When will you have your first lesson? I'll do it very gradually. It won't hurt, I promise you. I'll just lead up from that ghost of a smile you've got already to an honest-to-God laugh. I can't die happy till I've heard you laugh."

He was irresponsible, good-tempered, high-spirited, and quite impervious to snubs. He was in every way the exact opposite of Harold. The sight of him lounging about, ready for any prank, his merry blue eyes alight with laughter, would send her thoughts with a thrill of pride to the thought of Harold's purposefulness and ambition. Already Harold had taken another room to serve as warehouse and office combined. Already he was considering giving up his job. It was all Jennie could do to get through the book-keeping and correspondence in the evenings and at week-ends. She often felt dazed and drunk with sheer tiredness, and she was beginning to have headaches that were like red-hot needles pressing into the nerves of her temples—but she was upheld by her loyalty to Harold, and her fierce glad pride in him. He would describe the house they would live in when they were married, and she would listen, deeply impressed, and secretly a little frightened by the grandeur of it all. She would think of it as she sat over the desk in the office, and, looking up to meet Jimmie's laughing friendly gaze, would feel vaguely comforted. Finally, she came to look on it less as an actual house in which she was going to live than as the sign and token of Harold's success, and then the familiar thrill of pride and loyalty would seize her whenever she thought of it.

Harold had given up his post at the office now and had taken a larger room for his warehouse. With that vein of caution that was so strongly developed in him he wished her to continue her work at the office till he had consolidated his position yet further. She went to his warehouse every evening as usual to do his books and see to the correspondence. As usual she spent all the week-ends there working for him. It never occurred to him to wonder if it was too much for her—he had no thought to spare from himself and his career—and she herself was still upheld by a pride in him that never flagged.

One night, returning to her room, she found Jimmie Wrigram hanging about in the road just outside. He approached her, grinning.

"Well, I've run you to earth," he said. "I can never get a word with you at the office, so I found out where you lived."

She was too tired to smile or pretend a welcome.

"What do you want?" she said.

"I want you to marry me," he blurted out. "Listen. I've been in love with you ever since I saw you. No, do listen. I've tried to do it in the ordinary way, to take you out and lead up to it gradually and that sort of thing, but you weren't having any, and—well, I love you. I thought I'd come and have a sporting shot at it. I shall never want to marry anyone else. Won't you give me a chance?"

She told him then that she was engaged to Harold Marston. He laughed shortly.

"That chap! He's no good."

She flamed up, telling him with angry triumph all that Harold had already done. He dismissed it with an airy wave of his hand.

"Oh, I know all that," he said. "He'll forge ahead all right in that way. He'll end at the top of the tree. But that sort of thing doesn't matter. He'll never teach you to see a joke. He'll never teach you to laugh, and that's what you need."

Her annoyance was out of all proportion to his offence.

"I never want to see you or speak to you again," she said, as she turned on her heel and left him. The next morning he met her with such a friendly grin that she thought for a moment that his proposal must have been a dream. At first

she pretended not to see him, then after a few days—reassured, because he seemed to have accepted her answer as final—began to respond again with her faint grave smile.

But the time had now come when Harold said that she could give up her job at the office and join him as a full-time worker. And she was a very full-time worker indeed. Harold would have seen to that, even if she herself had not been full of eager zest to devote every atom of her energy to bring his goal of success nearer. There was no question of their being married yet. Every penny Harold could spare had to go back into the business. For the same reason, of course, he could not pay her as good a salary as she had earned at the office, though she worked harder and for longer hours. It never occurred to her to resent this. Indeed, Harold himself lived so austerely that she felt it was selfish of her to take even the small salary he paid her. He lived in an airless room above the warehouse, and he "did" for himself, making his meals generally of bread and margarine and fruit that he bought for next to nothing from the green-grocers next door because it was over-ripe. He now carried on a large retail business at the warehouse, dressing its windows with an array of cheap confectionery interspersed with large notices. "Buy Direct From The Manufacturers." "Save Middlemen's Profits." "Confectionery at Cut Prices."

It became fairly well known, and business men, going home from the city, would make a detour to call there and buy boxes of chocolates for their wives and daughters.

Jennie served in this "shop" as well as keeping the books and the correspondence. The shop was open till all hours and had no early closing day. The week-ends were a breathless rush to finish off the business of the week before and get ready for the next. Jennie had now moved into another bed-sitting room so as to be nearer to the warehouse. It was smaller and more cheerless than the other, but so much more comfortable than the airless little cupboard where Harold slept, that she felt quite guiltily self-indulgent about it.

Occasionally she thought of Jimmie Wrigram, and thought of him rather wistfully as one thinks of a friend whom one will never meet again. She was surprised therefore to find him waiting for her in her room one evening when she came home from work. He greeted her as usual with his friendly grin.



"So you *are* learning to enjoy yourself?" he said. "Well, I'm glad to hear that, even though it's not me you've been out with."

"I've not been out with anyone," she said rather shortly. "I've just come back from work."

"Good Lord! You don't work till this hour, do you?"

"We've had rather a rush to-day." Then defiantly, as if daring him to pity her, "and I *love* the work. I'd rather be working with Harold than—than—anything," she ended somewhat lamely.

"Well, if it's work you're after you've got the right man," he grinned.

"I *have* got the right man," she snapped. "I don't need you to tell me that. I love Harold. What have you come for?"

"I came to ask you to marry me again," he said. "I hoped you'd changed your mind, but I suppose I may take it that you haven't."

"Of course I haven't."

He twinkled at her.

"Well, neither have I, and I never will. Look here—if you won't marry me, come out with me to-morrow night. We'll go to the pictures and have a jolly time."

"Of course I can't."

"But you *must* learn how to laugh," he said with mock earnestness. "You don't realise how important it is. It's my life's work to teach you how to see a joke. Harold never will."

"Do go away, Jimmie. I've got a headache."

"Of course you have. The wonder to me is that you're alive at all. You look ten years older than you are. You've been wearing that suit for over two years too. Why don't you buy yourself something new and up-to-date? Why do you try to make yourself look as old and drab as you can? You ought to look young and pretty. I wish you'd let me teach you."

She flushed hotly.

"Will you please *go*," she said.

"I will if you'll promise me something. When you feel you'd like to come out with me and learn how to laugh, just come round to my place—you know where it is—and say 'I'm ready, Jimmie.' I'll be waiting for you every night."

And I won't give up hope of marrying you till you're actually married to your Harold."

She turned on him, trembling with anger.

"Will you go——"

And just then Harold came in with a ledger under his arm. He had thought of a new method of keeping the books and wanted to explain it to Jennie. Jennie went pale and caught her breath, afraid for a moment of an actual fight between the two men. But Harold's expression reassured her. He saw in Jimmie only a possible customer for his cheap confectionery. He gave him a price list and said that if he could get him a £1 order each week from the office, he would give him a five-per-cent commission. He held forth to Jimmie on the advantages of buying direct from the manufacturers and eliminating the middlemen's profits. Jimmie listened with twinkling eyes, asked impudent questions that Harold took quite seriously, and finally departed with a handful of price lists that he said he would distribute to-morrow morning.

There were tears of mortification in Jennie's eyes.

"About the new system——" began Harold as soon as he had gone.

"Harold, I'm so tired," she said unsteadily. "Do you mind if we put it off till to-morrow?"

"Very well," said Harold, obviously disappointed, "but you'll be at the office half an hour early, won't you, because I don't want to waste my morning on it."

She promised, and he said goodnight and departed.

When he had gone she went over to the glass and examined her reflection frowningly. She *did* look worn and old. Her suit *did* look shabby and old-fashioned. She wondered if she should ask for a little extra money for a new one. She had stopped drawing a regular salary now. It seemed so selfish to draw a salary when Harold only took enough for his bare needs. She had begun to draw just enough to pay for her room and food, though Harold had generously said that she could take anything else for necessary expenses that she needed. Should she ask him for money for a new suit, tell him that she'd had it for two years and wanted a new one? Harold had had his suit for nearly four years. She stiffened her sagging loyalty and endurance. She wouldn't be more self-indulgent, less courageous than Harold. She wouldn't

be the first to flag in the road to the goal they had chosen. It was only for a few years, after all. Harold had often said so. When he was successful, he said, she could have anything she wanted. She felt self-reproachful for her irritation with him. His lack of jealousy only proved his simple-mindedness, his generosity of spirit. He was himself so upright that the possibility of deceit in another man never even occurred to him. And Jimmie had been outrageous. She hardened her heart against him.

The business was doing well, but there was still no prospect of their marriage. Harold was taking another shop, stocking it with his cut-price confectionery, and installing Jennie in charge of it with one young girl assistant straight from school. It needed every penny of capital that he could scrape together. Jennie now lived in a room over the shop, and, except that she was always tired and that nowadays the red hot needles danced a permanent jig on the nerves of her temples, she enjoyed the excitement and thrill of this new venture. She worked as she had never worked before, and soon it was obvious that it was going to succeed. It weathered the first critical month then sailed on through smooth waters. Harold was very grateful to her. He praised her unstintingly and said, generously enough, that the success of the venture was entirely owing to her efforts. He said that he would never forget all she had done for him in these difficult days. But he added that every penny they could spare must still go back into the business, for the new shop was only a small part of his scheme. His scheme was a chain of such shops throughout the suburbs. They must strain every nerve now to get capital to forge the next link of the chain. His only reference to their marriage was a vague, "It will only be for a few years now if things go on all right."

She saw less of Harold, of course, now that she was in charge of the new shop. He called in occasionally to see how it was going on and to congratulate her on its success, but he was away a good deal, finding likely places for the next links of the chain and buying goods for the two existing ones. He had a flair for buying. His long sharp nose seemed to be able to smell out bankrupt stocks from miles away. He had quite given up the wholesale distributing side of his business and was experimenting in manufacturing himself, stirring toffee mixtures in an old saucepan over a gas ring

in his airless cupboard and bringing the result to Jennie for her to taste.

"What do you think of it?" he would say, watching her anxiously. The something pathetic about him that had first attracted her was at these times more than she could bear. She wanted to reassure him, to comfort him, to give him all the success and wealth he was killing himself for. When he had hit on a mixture that cost practically nothing to make and was quite a passable imitation of treacle toffee, he bought a huge second-hand cauldron and engaged a decrepit old man to mix and stir it in one of the dingy little cellars of his old warehouse, at a salary of fifteen shillings a week. Most of his workers were so old or so young that they could not command standard wages. There was something cheap and makeshift about all his arrangements. But the toffee was a success, and he set about other experiments. It was when "Marston's Old Fashioned Treacle Toffee" had begun to sell like wild-fire that she said one evening.

"I'm afraid I shall have to draw out a little extra for clothes this week, Harold."

He glanced at her nervously.

"How much?"

"Say five pounds."

She had never asked for more than a few shillings for clothes before.

He gave it her without demur, but he looked so reproachful that she felt a sudden compunction.

"Harold, if you can't spare it——"

"Oh, yes, that's all right," he said, "it's only that—well, these are just the difficult years, you see. Now that we're beginning to expand we'll need every penny we can scrape together."

"Of course. I can manage quite well with the three pounds, Harold."

She handed him back two pounds, and he took them without comment. After a short silence he said:

"Things will be quite different, of course, for us in a year or two."

She bought a cheap red woollen dress that nevertheless suited her, and she thought of Jimmie as she put it on. She was glad that she had lost sight of Jimmie. She frequently told herself that she was glad that she had lost sight of Jimmie.

He'd made a intolerable nuisance of himself, and he'd been so rude to Harold that she never wanted to see him again. Yet somehow she couldn't feel as annoyed as she wanted to feel when she saw him walk into the shop the very evening she'd put on the red dress for the first time.

"What do you want?" she said brusquely.

"A halfporth of bull's eyes," he grinned.

"How did you know where I was?"

"I tracked you down," he replied. "It's no use your trying to go anywhere where I can't track you down. Well—will you come out with me to-night?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I'm too busy."

"Rats! The shop closes at seven."

"I know. But I've got the books to do after that and the orders to send off and a hundred other things to do."

"I'll come and help you, shall I?"

"No."

"When will you come out with me? I'm never going to stop asking you, you know. I haven't begun my life's work yet and I'm getting quite middle-aged."

She began to feel annoyed again and at last managed to get rid of him. Somehow it gave her great pleasure all the next week to remember the real annoyance she'd felt with Jimmie. Of course she disliked him, always had disliked him. She wouldn't have felt as annoyed as that with him if she hadn't really disliked him.

But she had not time to waste on thoughts of Jimmie.

Another branch of "Marston's" was being opened and she was to go to take charge of it, and steer it through the shallows and quicksands of its inauguration. There followed two more years of hard work and constant movement. As each new branch of Marstons opened she was put in charge of it, moving on to the next as soon as it was safely and successfully launched. Jimmie ran her to earth after each move and appeared, grinning and impudent and uncruised as ever. Each time she impressed upon herself and him her annoyance at his appearance, and tried to ignore a feeling of uneasiness before he found her, of content when he had finally discovered her whereabouts.

"It's just that he's someone," she explained to herself.

"I've no time for friends in the ordinary way and I see so little of Harold."

She saw little of Harold, but she knew that he was fast approaching the goal he had set himself. Hurrying in to inspect her books, he would say, "Good, good! In a year now I shall be where I meant to be, and we can take things easier."

In a year now they'd be married, she translated. For it had been a tacit understanding for some time that their marriage was not to take place till he had attained what he had set out to attain. She knew that he was beginning to relax his efforts, to go out among people. He dressed well now and had begun to pay her a regular and quite generous salary.

"You're sure that you can afford it, Harold?" she had said anxiously.

"Of course," he had replied. "It's little enough for what you've done for me. I'm not opening any more branches now. And I'm going to look round for a decent flat soon."

That seemed to bring her marriage very near.

A month later she got a note from him.

"Found a flat. Will you come and have tea with me to-morrow, 4-30?"

She bought a new dress to do him credit and set off with a quickly beating heart. They would settle things finally this afternoon. . . . Perhaps he had already bought an engagement ring for her.

It was a large block of furnished flats near the Marble Arch. A uniformed page boy took her up in the lift. Harold himself opened the door to her. She stepped into the small hall and looked about her. Smart—just too smart—she'd alter that—she'd take down those hard magenta curtains and put up soft blue ones in their place. She'd—he was opening a further door and showing her into a drawing room. Just too smart, like the hall. Not homely. She'd—she started suddenly. A girl was rising from a chair by the fireplace. She went with the flat. She was hard and modern and just too smart. Her sleek hair, her smooth skin, her white hands, and long-shaped gleaming nails, told of meticulous care and grooming.

She was coming forward to greet Jennie, with a graceful undulating movement of her thin hips, her reddened lips

curved into an insincere smile that was almost a sneer. As she came full into the light Jennie had to admit that she was very beautiful. Beautiful and, despite her assurance and poise, little more than a child. A hard sophisticated modern child with that air of resigned boredom that is the mark of the age. A child who had always had everything she wanted, who looked upon wealth as her right.

Harold was drawing Jennie towards her.

"Now I want you to meet Jennie, Sheila," he was saying. "She's been my right hand for years. I don't know what I should have done without her. She's been secretary, confidential clerk, head saleswoman, everything. . . . This is Miss Beverley, Jennie, my fiancée. We hope to be married next month."

The room with its crude modern colourings and furniture suddenly receded to a great distance, as though it were one of those tiny rooms made in a matchbox that one sees in curio collections. Then gradually it came nearer again and took its true proportions. She was conscious of no emotion—only of an odd detached scientific interest in the question of whether Harold had really persuaded himself that she had never been anything to him but a sort of confidential secretary, or whether he was deliberately using this method to break the news that he did not intend to marry her. It was, after all, quite a good method. The presence of the other woman would prevent her demanding an explanation, would make her indeed accept the whole situation as final. He knew her well enough to be sure of that. Beneath her gentleness she was very proud.

The girl quite evidently took the situation at its face value. This dowdy middle-aged woman was an employee of her fiancé's, and she must be kind and condescending to her. It was boring, but then so were most things. It was boring having to marry this very obviously self-made manufacturer, but she had to marry money—life without money was impossible, of course—and his was the best offer. With a flash of intuition Jennie saw quite clearly Harold's point of view. She was just the right kind of woman to help him win his position, but not the right kind of woman to help him enjoy it. He wanted someone younger, smarter, better-looking for that, someone who had the entrée into the world of fashion upon which he was now making tentative assaults.

The girl handed her a cup of tea with an air of languid insolence, then began to talk to Harold as if she were not there.

"You won't forget that we're dining with Uncle Herbert to-night, will you, dear?" she said. "It's rather a bore, but he knows a lot of useful people."

That odd numbness that had seized Jennie's emotion when she heard the news—leaving her perceptions so clear and vivid—began to die away. She steeled herself for agonising grief, but it didn't come. To her surprise she was conscious only of relief. She needn't marry Harold with his white rat-like face and spreading paunch. That something of pathos and wistfulness that had once attracted her had vanished long ago. He looked mean, furtive, greedy. She needn't marry him, she needn't slave at "Marstons." She realised—for the first time and with surprise—that she had always hated the cheapness and tawdriness of "Marstons," the cheap goods, the cheap assistants, the false showiness of the whole thing. She had been like a horse toiling up a hill in blinkers, seeing nothing on either side, her eyes fixed upon the top of the hill, determined to get there at all costs, without knowing why. And now the blinkers were removed and she could look about her. When had she stopped loving Harold? Had she ever loved him? For years she had been too tired to look beyond the next job.

"We shall have to start early," the girl was saying in her hard drawling voice, "he dines at seven—such a ridiculous hour——"

"I must go," said Jennie rising. "It's so kind of you to have asked me."

Her eyes darted mockingly to Harold, but his slid away furtively.

He did not come to see her out.

She walked home quickly. A feeling of lightheartedness possessed her. She felt as if heavy chains had dropped from her. She was free, free of Harold, free of Marstons, free at last of the long weary drudgery of years, free, free, free.

She entered her room and there—Jimmy was waiting for her.

"Jennie!" he cried. "What's the matter?"

For with the falling away of her chains had fallen away too her seriousness, her premature middle-age. She looked young, alive, bright-eyed.



She stood against the door, looking at him. With the knowledge that she didn't love Harold, had come the knowledge that she loved Jimmie, that she had loved Jimmie from the beginning. She thought of her long years of struggling for Harold, of Harold's calm use of her, his equally calm rejection of her. And suddenly the situation seemed to her supremely, ridiculously, funny—one of the richest jokes she had ever heard. And she began to laugh at herself, at Harold, at life itself. There was no bitterness in her laughter. It was the laughter of a light-hearted girl—without alloy of malice or regret.

"Oh, Jimmie!" she said at last, wiping her eyes, "It's Harold who's taught me to see a joke, after all—but you can go on with it if you really want to——"

## MARIE CORELLI

### *The Silence of the Maharajah*

Marie Corelli was the daughter of an Italian father and a Scottish mother, and was educated in France with a view to a musical career. On her return to England she wrote a romantic story which was so successful that she abandoned music in favour of writing, and before long established herself as one of the most popular novelists of the day, with an enormous following of faithful readers. *The Sorrows of Satan*, *The Mighty Atom* and *The Master Christian* were her principal books.



## THE SILENCE OF THE MAHARAJAH

OUT in India at a certain English station which was generally admitted to be socially "fast," with that unique sort of fastness peculiar to Anglo-Indian life, the leader of the most "rapid" set was a handsome, dashing woman, known to the irreverent as "Lolly," and to the more orthodox as Mrs. Claude Annesley. She was the wife of Colonel Claude Annesley, of course, but this fact had to be strongly borne in upon the minds of those who were not thoroughly well acquainted with her, because at first sight she did not appear to be the wife of anybody. She gave you the impression of being a "free lance" among women, joyously insolent and independent; and the bonds of matrimony seemed to press very lightly on her frivolous butterfly soul. She was not what one would call positively young any longer, being a trifle over forty, but she was so slim and light on her feet, besides knowing exactly what kind of corsets would give her the most perfectly pliant and *svelte* figure, that she was generously allowed by her men friends (though not by her women rivals) to pass for being still in the early thirties. She went in thoroughly, too, for all the newest methods of "skin treatment," and succeeded in preserving a fresh and even brilliant natural complexion, despite the heats of India. She was tall and brown-haired, with dark eyes which had a sparkle of the devil's own mischief in them; she had very white even teeth, and could smile bewitchingly.

Her husband was younger than herself—some said four or five years younger—though at times he looked ten years older. He was a big, gaunt, grave-featured man with a turn for philosophy. He would sit silently smoking for hours, meditating inwardly and looking very old; but if a friendly comrade came in and disturbed his solitude with some senseless yet well-meaning remark about the weather or the Government, he would spring up to give a hearty

return greeting; his eyes, which were a clear blue, would flash with pleasure, and in a moment he became young—quite young, with an almost boyish youngness which was amazing. It was on these occasions that people called him handsome, and murmured among themselves, *sotto-voce*, “I wonder why he married Lolly?”

And somehow it did seem a singular thing, till one fine day somebody discovered the reason of it. It was very simple, and not at all uncommon. “Lolly” had money; Colonel Annesley had none, or what was as bad as none. “Lolly” entertained largely, and gave expensive luncheons and garden-parties; her husband was little more than an invited guest at these. He did not pay for them—he could not pay; and though he was supposed to do the honours, he fulfilled this duty with so timid and hesitating a demeanour that Mrs. Annesley would generally send him away to smoke by himself, saying, with a perfectly unruffled brow and good-natured laugh, “Really, Claude, you have no tact!” And certainly he did appear to be deficient in this social quality. It was impossible to the gaunt, young-old Colonel to feign things—to pretend he was rich when he knew he was poor; to assume the airs of manly and easy independence when his wife had all the sinews of war and reins of government and expenditure in her hands, and seldom lost an opportunity of reminding him of the fact. Of course he had his pay, but that he scrupulously set aside for his own clothes, tobacco, and extras. A good deal of it went, by the by, in his annual birthday present to his wife. He was at heart a good fellow, yet somehow as soon as people found out that his wife had all the money and he had none, he got generally misunderstood. Sentimental young ladies exclaimed to one another, “What a horrid man!—to marry for money!” Mothers who had dowerless daughters to wed experienced a violent revulsion of feeling against him, and observed, “Dear me! Fancy if *all* men were as selfish as Colonel Annesley!” His own sex, however, thought more leniently of him. Impecunious officers judged him by themselves, and said feelingly, “He’s not to be blamed for looking after the main chance. And Lolly must be a trial, even taking the cash in.”

Nevertheless they were obliged to own that “Lolly” was not without her charm. She was extremely good-tempered, an excellent hostess, a clever match-maker, a

sprightly talker, and a generally accomplished society woman all round. So that everybody was not a little interested and excited when it was known that Mrs. Claude Annesley had made up her mind to entertain for three or four days in the grandest style the Maharajah of the neighbouring province, a prince noted for his wealth and the enormous quantity of his jewels. He was young, and had received a first-class English college education, and according to report was a very superior type of native potentate, being something of a poet in his own fanciful way of Eastern symbolism, and having furthermore distinguished himself by the publication of a brilliantly-written treatise in Hindustani on the most recent discoveries in astronomy. Wherefore Mrs. Annesley determined to "lionise" him. She did not consult the Colonel on the subject at all; his opinion would have been worth nothing. She believed somewhat in the creed of the "New" woman, which declares men generally to be either brutes or fools. She did not include her husband in the former class; he was too gentlemanly and inoffensive; but she silently and without open incivility placed him among the latter. Consequently, in her proposed intention to "make capital" out of the entertainment of a bejewelled Maharajah, he—"poor Claude," as she called him—was not admitted into the discussion of ways and means. He was only the ornamental dummy or figure-head of the establishment. The house, the biggest residence in the whole place, and almost palatial, was Hers; the money was Hers. He had nothing to do with it; he was merely Her husband. Therefore, when he met people who said, "So the Maharajah is coming to stay with you?" he answered absently, "I believe so," without being at all certain on the point. He thought about it now and then while smoking his own tobacco, tobacco which he found particularly soothing because he had paid for it himself, and did not owe it to his wife's purse. And he was not at all sure that he liked the idea of the Maharajah's visit. He did not take kindly to native princes. He had all the prejudices of the pugnacious Briton "born for precedence," and had no love for that type of human being known to some poets as the "dusky, dark-eyed Oriental." Dusky and dark-eyed the Oriental might be, but he was also likely to be dirty. And "poor Claude," though apparently vague on other matters, had particularly strong ideas on the subject of frequent

"tubbing." It was to this, perhaps, that he owed his rather fine, clear skin, under which the blood flowed with such easy freedom that he was frequently accused of blushing. The least emotion or excitement of a pleasurable nature brought a ruddy tint to his cheeks, and gave them that "glow of health" for which certain beauties pay so much per box or bottle at the perfumer's. He blushed now at the possibility of having an untubbed Maharajah in the house.

"However," he murmured, "he's had an English education, and she *will* have her way"—that "she" referring to his wife, lady, and ruler—"I like a quiet life, and it's best not to interfere. She's got a perfect right to do as she likes with her own money."

And he resigned himself as usual to the inevitable. For there was no doubt that the Maharajah was coming. He had accepted the invitation given him, and he was known to be a man of his word. His treatise on astronomy had proved him to be that. He had said he would write that treatise, and nobody believed him, not even his college tutors. "He's too lazy," one Englishman remarked of him, the said Englishman having been four years at work on the writing of an extremely feeble novel which he had sent to London to get published, and which no publisher would accept; "he'll never write anything. I know these native fellows!" But, despite this prophecy, he had done it, and done it so well that it was the subject of interested and admiring comment among scientific people generally. And this very treatise on modern astronomy was one of the reasons why Mrs. Annesley wanted to lionise him. But it was not the chief reason—not by any means. The chief reason was perfectly human and particularly feminine: it was that Mrs. Claude Annesley wished to impress everybody in the place with a sense of *her* wealth, *her* importance, *her* influence, *her* position generally. And she had chosen this special time to do it because—well, the "because" involves a little explanation, which runs as follows:—

Long ago, and long before handsome Laura Egerton, now Mrs. Claude Annesley, had married Colonel Claude Annesley, while she was yet the dashing belle of the London "season," she had contracted what was for her a curiously sentimental friendship with a girl several years younger than herself—a pale, slim, tiny, golden-haired creature with

great plaintive grey eyes set in her small face like stars too big for the position in which they found themselves. This elf-like being exercised a peculiar fascination over the sprightly "Lolly," partly on account of her ethereal looks, which caused her to be sometimes called *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, after Keats' heart-throbbing poem, partly because she was so unworldly and childlike, and partly because she had such naive and fantastic notions concerning men. She was named Idreana, which had the advantage of being an unusual name and fascinating in its long-drawn vowel sounds.

Idreana used to say in her soft, thrilling voice, that a man, according to the notion *she* had formed of the one she could "love, honour and obey," must be a hero, morally and physically; that she pictured him as brave and tender, chivalrous and true. A grand great creature whom to look upon was to honour, revere, and adore! To lose one's very identity in an absorbing passion for such an one, to sacrifice everything for so worthy a master and lord, would be the happiest, proudest, most glorious fate imaginable for any woman! So she would speak, this fairy-like feminine bundle of nerves and sentiment, her whole little frame a-quiver with enthusiasm. And "Lolly," then in the thick of motley "society," would listen vaguely entranced, compassionately amused, wholly astonished, wondering within herself as to what would become of this self-deluding, imaginative small maiden when she came to know the world—when Fashion and Frivolity burst in like drunken clowns upon the holy quiet of her girlish fancies, and with blatant laughter and lascivious jest tore down the rose-coloured veil she had woven about herself, and forced her to look on social life as it is, and on men as they are. "Lolly" did not suffer from sentiment as a rule; and the only really violent attack of that malady she ever had was during her intimacy with this weird little Idreana.

And now Idreana was married—had been married three years or more, to a Captain Le Marchant, whose regiment was also stationed in India, but at a rather dismal place, a good way distant from the "happy valley," where Mrs. Claude Annesley held her social court; and thus it had happened that the two ladies, since their respective marriages, had never met. But they were going to meet now. Mrs. Annesley had invited Captain and Mrs. Le Marchant to



stay with her, and after some little delay the Captain had obtained a month's leave of absence, and the invitation was accepted. It was after this acceptance of the Le Marchants that Mrs. Annesley had bethought herself of entertaining the Maharajah. "It will astonish the Le Marchants," was her first thought. "It will please Idreana's picturesque turn of mind," was her second. Perhaps if her motive had been probed down to its farthest root, it would have been found to be nothing more nor less than a desire to "show off" before the friend of her unmarried days, and prove that her position as a wife was unexceptionable. She knew that *La Belle Dame sans Merci* had made a poor match, financially considered, and she had heard (only through friendly rumour of course) that Captain Le Marchant, though a "fine man," had contracted rather a disagreeable habit, that of getting heavily drunk on occasions. But she could not quite believe this. "If it were so, Idreana, with her fastidious notions about men, would never have married him," she thought. Yet she admitted within herself that it was quite possible Idreana, like other women "with fastidious notions," might have been deceived.

It was with a certain amount of curiosity and excitement, therefore, that Mrs. Claude Annesley prepared to receive the Le Marchants on the afternoon of their arrival. They came a few days before the date fixed for the visit of the Maharajah, and it is due to Mrs. Claude Annesley's sense of old friendship and hospitality to observe that she was much more particular over the comfortable arrangements of the rooms set apart for Idreana and Idreana's husband than she was for the adornment of those palatial apartments, the best in her large luxurious residence, which were destined to receive the Maharajah. She was genuinely eager to see her little friend of former days again, and wondered if marriage had altered her—if she had lost that singularly sylph-like *Belle Dame sans Merci* expression that had once marked her out from ordinary young women.

"Her hair was long, her foot was light,  
And her eyes were wild!"

hummed Mrs. Annesley softly, as she moved from room to room, setting flowers here, a mirror there, and giving to everything that final touch which is essentially feminine, and

which imparts even to lifeless furniture a sentient, confidential, and welcoming air. "What will she think of us all, I wonder?" "Us all" included herself and a very large number of officers and civilians, married and unmarried—"the boys" as she called them. The wives of the married ones did not come into the category, neither was Colonel Annesley counted among "the boys." In fact, he was not to be discovered in any particular social roll-call; he was not exactly a "boy"; and as he was in a manner dependent on his wife, he was not exactly a man. This is socially speaking. In his regiment he was thought a good deal of. But as this story has nothing to do with his regiment, and does not in the least concern his military career, there is no occasion to enlarge on the ideas of the regiment concerning him. They were old-fashioned ideas, very blunt and commonplace, and did not take in Mrs. Annesley at all as part of the Colonel's existence. They are very well known, and have been duly chronicled.

"What will she think of us all?" repeated Mrs. Annesley with a smile and an approving glance at her well-dressed figure as she passed a convenient mirror. "She was always such a quixotic little thing. I am curious to see what sort of a husband she has chosen."

Her curiosity was almost immediately gratified, for as she entered her drawing-room, after a final survey of the apartments prepared for her visitors, Captain and Mrs. Le Marchant, with their servants, their bag and baggage, duly arrived, and were straightway announced.

"My dear Idreana!" cried Mrs. Annesley, stepping quickly to embrace the small, slight figure of the woman now entering the doorway, "What an age it is since we met!" Then again, "My dear Idreana!"

The small woman smiled—a rather grave and doubtful smile.

"It is pleasant to see you again, Laura," she said in a low voice. Then with a touch of something like appeal in her tone, "Let me introduce—my husband."

A tall, heavily-made man, thickly moustached, with fine eyes and a somewhat flushed face, bowed.

"Charmed to meet you!" he drawled. "Old friend of my wife's—delightful! Awfully good of you to put us up!"

"Oh, the pleasure is mine, I assure you!" exclaimed

Mrs. Annesley eagerly, anxious to put an end to the temporary embarrassment of introduction, and nervously conscious that she had taken an instant dislike to Captain Le Marchant.

"I cannot tell you how delighted I am to see dear Idreana again. And as sweet as ever! Positively, my dear, you look a mere child still; no one would ever take you for a married woman. Do sit down and have some tea before you go to your rooms. Claude! Claude!"

Colonel Annesley, part of whose marital duty it was to be always within call on the arrival of visitors, entered from the verandah.

"This is *my* husband," said Mrs. Annesley with a sudden glow of unaccustomed pride as she noticed that "poor Claude" did really look singularly distinguished as contrasted with Le Marchant—"Colonel Annesley, Captain Le Marchant; and this, Claude, is Mrs. Le Marchant, my dear little friend of old days at home, Idreana."

Colonel Annesley bowed, not without a certain grace. In one keen glance he had taken in the characteristics of the married pair.

"The man is of the 'fine brute' bull-throated type," he said inwardly, "and his wife—poor little sweet soul!"

These were his only mental comments; he was accustomed to disguise his feelings. He sat down by Mrs. Le Marchant and began talking to her, now and then asking her husband the particulars of their journey and other trifles, in order to bring him into the conversation. For once Mrs. Annesley felt grateful to "poor Claude." He was making things easy—things that she would somehow have found difficult. For not only did she not like the look of Captain Le Marchant but she was painfully impressed by the expression in Mrs. Le Marchant's face. Idreana was still wonderful to look at with her cloud of gold hair and small delicate face—she was still the very ideal of the *Belle Dame sans Merci*, but she was a *Belle Dame* who had been mysteriously insulted and outraged. A silent tragedy was written in her large deep eyes; a hint of it was set in the proud curve of her upper lip; traces of it were discernible in one or two lines about her mouth and forehead. She was choicely though simply attired. She listened to Colonel Annesley's conversation attentively, and answered his various questions with that gentleness and grace which mark perfect breeding; and then, tea being finished,

she accompanied Mrs. Annesley to her room, leaving her husband to smoke with his host on the verandah. Once alone together, the two women looked each other steadily in the face. Then Mrs. Annesley spoke out impulsively.

"Idreana, you are not happy?"

"I'm sorry my condition is so evident," said Idreana with a pale smile, setting aside her hat and cloak. "Certainly, I am not happy. But it doesn't matter."

"Doesn't matter?"

"No! Why should it? People are not meant to be happy in this world." She sat down, and clasping her hands in her lap looked up seriously. "Dreams fade, delusions die—life is never what it seems to promise. This is everybody's story; it is mine. I do not complain."

"But you married for love, Idreana?"

"Certainly I did," she answered. "You put it exactly—for love. I wanted love—I longed for it, as they say the saints long for God. One hears and reads so much about love in one's youth, you know, once actually believes in it. I believed in it; it was foolish of me to fasten my faith on a mere rumour. Did you marry for love too?"

A faint flush tinted Mrs. Annesley's well-preserved skin.

"No dear," she admitted frankly. "I married—well, because it was time I married. I was getting what they call *passée*. I wanted a sober and respectable husband. And Colonel Annesley is that."

"Ah!" and Idreana's straight brows contracted. "Well, Captain Le Marchant is *not* that."

Mrs. Annesley started. The report she had heard, the friendly report, was true, then.

"My dear, I am sorry," she began stammeringly.

"Don't be sorry," said Idreana, rising and beginning to arrange her hair in front of the mirror. "And don't let us talk about it. You know what fancies I used to have? Well, they are dead and done for. I have buried them all, and—sometimes—I brood a little over the grave. But you were always sensible; you never had any delusions to bury, and my griefs, such as they are, have chiefly risen from my own wilful ignorance of things. I understand life now, and am quite prepared to live it out without undue grumbling at the inevitable."

She raised a mass of her bright hair and settled it in its

place. Mrs. Annesley looked at her wonderingly, and the former romantic fascination this slight creature used to exercise over her own matter-of-fact disposition, returned.

"How pretty you are, Idreana!" she said with ungrudging admiration. "How very pretty! Whatever you have suffered, your looks are not spoilt."

"I am glad of that," returned Mrs. Le Marchant with a little laugh in which there was a ring of bitterness. "No woman likes to grow ugly—the sense of ugliness almost makes one lose one's self-respect. But, my dear Laura"—here her voice softened—"you always thought too much of me. You were a beauty in your girlhood—I never was."

"No, you were never a beauty," returned Mrs. Annesley musingly, "but you were what you are still—an indescribable being. And, do you know, I don't think men get on with indescribable beings. Antony liked Cleopatra, and she was indescribable; but then the modern man is never a Marc Antony, though I believe there are plenty of Cleopatras among modern women. You are a sort of enigma, you know; you can't help it—you were made like that, and men are always silly at guessing enigmas."

Idreana smiled rather sadly. "I think you mistake me, dear," she said gently: "I am not an enigma. I am only a weak, loving woman whose best emotions have been killed like leaves in a frost. There never was any mystery about my nature, and if there seems to you any mystery now, it is only because I try to shut within myself the secret of my life's disappointment and sorrow. If my heart is broken, the world need not know it. And you will help me, will you not?" she added with a certain tremulous eagerness. "You will not let any one guess my husband's——" here she paused and sought for a word, and finally said, "my husband's failing. One must always keep up appearances, and there is no occasion to make an exhibition of one's domestic griefs for the benefit of unsympathetic society. While we are here, you, as hostess, can do so much for me; in your hospitality you will not, I am sure, encourage Captain Le Marchant in his habit——"

She broke off, and her self-command gave way a little. Mrs. Annesley saw the tears in her eyes, and her own throat contracted unpleasantly.

"Of course not, my dear," she said hastily. "But—I must

tell Claude. Otherwise, you see, he will keep on passing the wine and other things. He is very good-natured, and he has an idea that every decent man knows when he has had enough——” Here she paused, remembering that “poor Claude” himself was one of these decent men. “He is really an awfully good fellow” she thought, with a most curious and quite novel touch of remorse. “Now I come to consider it, he has been the most perfect of husbands!” Aloud, she went on, “You agree with me, don’t you, Idreana, that it will be best just to mention it to Claude?”

Mrs. Le Marchant’s large pathetic eyes appeared to be looking dreamily into futurity.

“Yes, it will be best,” she answered at last. “Besides, your husband is a good man, and naturally you can have no secrets from him.”

Mrs. Annesley winced a little and flushed. Things were not exactly as Idreana put them. But never mind! Idreana was always fanciful. She was silent, and presently Mrs. Le Marchant spoke again.

“One thing I have not told you,” she said. “I had a child.”

“You had, Idreana!” and Mrs. Annesley gazed at her with a lurking envy in her soul, for in this respect the Fates had not been good to her. “When?”

“Oh! nearly two years ago.” And the delicate face of the *Belle Dame sans Merci* grew paler and more wistful. “It was a pretty little creature, and I always imagine it loved me, though it was so young. It died when it was three months old.”

“My poor darling,” exclaimed Mrs. Annesley, slipping an arm round the younger woman’s waist. “What a trial for you! What a grief!”

“No, it was a gladness,” said Idreana quietly. “I have thanked God many a time for my baby’s death. If it had lived”—she shuddered—“it might have grown up to be like its father!”

The intense horror in her tone sent quite a disagreeable chill through her listener’s blood. This was dreadful! Idreana was dreadful; the conversation was dreadful! It must be put a stop to. Mrs. Annesley’s eminently practical nature suddenly asserted itself.

“My dear girl, for goodness’ sake don’t let us get on these melancholy subjects,” she said briskly, the social “Lolly,”

beginning to shine out of every feature of her still handsome face. "You mustn't think about troubles while you are with me. You are here for a little change and gaiety, and I intend that you shall enjoy yourself. We'll manage Captain Le Marchant, and you will have no need to fret yourself. Just you put on a pretty gown now, and make yourself look as sweet as ever you can; there are some nice fellows coming to dine to-night, and I want them to admire you. I shall have to run away myself now to change my dress. Will you be long?"

"No," answered Mrs. Le Marchant gently, "I shall not be long."

Mrs. Annesley paused on the threshold, with a bright look. "And, oh!" she said, "I forgot to tell you that we are going to have a wonderful native prince here on a visit—a really very delightful Maharajah, extremely well educated. He speaks English perfectly, and he wears—oh! my dear! *such* diamonds! We are going to hold some big receptions in his honour, and wind up with a ball. I am sure you will enjoy it all immensely."

She nodded and tripped off, meeting Captain Le Marchant on the way. He was coming up to his room to dress for dinner, under the escort of Colonel Annesley.

"Claude," she said in her sweetest voice, "when you have shown Captain Le Marchant his room, will you come to me? I want to speak to you."

The Colonel returned assent, and presently came into the drawing-room, where he found his wife awaiting him.

"Claude," she began hesitatingly, "it's a dreadful thing to have to say, but I'm obliged to tell you, Captain Le Marchant *drinks*!"

"He looks it," responded the Colonel briefly, and then stood "at attention" ready for further revelations.

"Oh, 'Claude,'" exclaimed "Lolly" irrelevantly, "I have never seen *you* drunk!"

Colonel Annesley stared.

"Of course not! What's that got to do with it?"

"Oh, I don't know." And Mrs. Annesley looked up, and then down nervously, and finally assuming her most impressive and wife-like manner she added, "I'm only so *glad* and *proud*, Claude, that I never *have*!"

The tall Colonel blushed and looked extremely young

A stranger observing him would have said he was evidently ashamed of himself. Perhaps he was. He said nothing, however, and only smiled dreamily.

"Claude," went on Mrs. Annesley, "you must try and keep this man sober—you must, really. Fancy if he were to make a scene with Idreana, *before* people, and *here*!"

"Does he make scenes with her?" inquired the Colonel.

"Well, she hasn't actually said so much, but I imagine he does. Anyway, keep the wine and spirits out of his reach, because, you see, if he never knows when to stop——"

"Beast!" muttered the Colonel under his breath.

His wife looked at him almost humbly. "Yes, he must be," she agreed. "Poor little Idreana!"

The Colonel did not echo this sentiment. He was playing with a small bullet that was set as a charm on his watch-chain (a bullet that had a history) and appeared stolidly unmoved.

"You understand, Claude, don't you?" went on his wife.

"You are the host, and you mustn't be the one to set temptation in his way. Don't let him have the chance to disgrace himself."

The Colonel looked perplexed. "I'll do my best," he said curtly, and turned on his heel to leave the room.

"Claude!" called his wife softly.

He came back obediently.

"You haven't got a flower in your coat for dinner," she said with a trembling little laugh. "Let me give you one."

She took a small, sweet-scented blossom from a vase and fastened it in his button-hole. Under his clear skin the blood swiftly reddened and rose to the very roots of his close-cropped brown hair. He was blushing again apparently, and again he looked extraordinarily young. A novel and peculiar sense of being petted and made much of was on him, but he was quite silent. He was too much astonished to speak.

"There!" said Mrs. Annesley with a coquettish look of triumph as she finished decorating him. "Now you do me credit!"

Surprise gave him a little catch in his throat. He coughed nervously.

"Do I?" he managed to say at last. "I—er—thank you!" And out he went in a whirl of amazement. She meanwhile



laughed and scolded herself for indulging in a sort of side flirtation with her own husband.

"Poor Claude!" she murmured, repeating that favourite phrase which had now become almost hackneyed. "But he really *is* a gentleman."

The dinner that night went off successfully. Captain Le Marchant made himself most agreeable, and managed to impress everybody more or less with the idea that he was really a "charming" man. Even Mrs. Annesley decided that he was "not so bad after all," and that perhaps Idreana, always imaginative, had unconsciously exaggerated his "failing." The Colonel sat listening to him like a good host, with polite and apparently absorbed attention. The gentlemen who added the intellectual grace and splendour of their presence to the table were chiefly young subalterns, open admirers and followers of Mrs. Annesley, who alternately flattered them, laughed at them, mocked them, neglected them, and drove them to despair, just as her humour suited her; and on this particular occasion these "boys" were rendered rather awkward and bashful by the fairy-like loveliness of Mrs. Le Marchant.

Idreana, dressed in pure white, with her gold hair knotted in a Greek twist, and her tragic-sweet eyes, was a wonderful sight to see. She said so little, she looked so much. She was only a small woman, but to the dazzled subalterns she was "immense!" They found her, as Mrs. Annesley had said, "indescribable," and did not quite know what to make of her. Her husband himself seemed to stand just a little in awe of her. What Colonel Annesley thought concerning her was not new. His first comment, "Poor little sweet soul!" still held good as the sum and substance of his opinion. It was a relief to the whole party to talk of the coming Maharajah. What he would do, and what they would do, formed a perpetually interesting topic of conversation. The "boys" commented silently on the fact that neither Colonel nor Mrs. Annesley seemed very lavish of wines at dinner, and that the "drink" generally was dispensed with a somewhat stingy care. But they were charitable "boys" and concluded that "Lolly" had run out of supplies and was laying in fresh stock. So that the evening passed off pleasantly without a hitch, and Captain Le Marchant showed no tendency whatever to fall into his "habit."

Some days now passed in pleasant tranquillity. Colonel Annesley, though he kept a constant watch on his guest with the "failing," began himself to think that the case had been over-stated. Beyond a more or less settled gloominess of disposition, Captain Le Marchant was very much like any other ordinary army man. He was not clever, and in conversation he was occasionally coarse, but on the whole he maintained a decent and well-bred behaviour. He was a magnificent athlete and a keen sportsman, and these attributes made him rather a popular "man's man." Idreana began to look happier; a little of the tragedy went out of her eyes, leaving the light of hope there instead, whereat Mrs. Annesley rejoiced unselfishly.

And at last the Maharajah arrived. In splendid garb he came, and showed himself to be a somewhat remarkable specimen of an Oriental. In the first place he was exceedingly handsome; secondly, he was exceptionally well-mannered. Courteous, yet not abating one jot of his dignity, he and a limited suite—limited in order not to put his hosts to too much trouble—took possession of that part of Mrs. Annesley's house reserved and arranged for his special accommodation. All the particulars of his caste had been noted and remembered, and he showed his appreciation of this careful forethought and consideration by proving himself to be what rumour had already described him, a brilliant and gifted man, whose conversational capacities were not to be despised. From the first hour of his arrival, he had fastened his glowing dark eyes on the fair and *spirituelle* beauty of Mrs. Le Marchant, and had, in the briefest possible space of time, fallen secretly a victim to her unconsciously exerted charm. For *her* he strove to appear at his best; to interest *her* he spoke of the long vigils which he was wont to pass on the flower-garlanded flat roof of his palace, his great telescope set up and pointed at the stars; to *her* he told strange legends of the East, myths and fantasies of India's oldest period; to see her large eyes sparkle and her sweet lips part in breathless attention he related hair-breadth escapes from the jaws of wild beasts, and wonderful adventures in forest or jungle.

And the other visitors would listen to him entranced, fascinated not only by his attractive personality, but also by the priceless jewels that flashed on his breast, diamonds clear as drops of dew, and opals shining with the mystic

evanescent light of frozen foam. He had about him a certain air of sovereignty which became him well, and which kept the fashionable vulgarity of the "fast" set in check. He was by turns elegant, wise, witty and humorous, and distinctly proved to a few of the frivolous and empty-headed that there is no necessity to cultivate "chaff" or learn stable slang in order to be considered clever. He was a curious lesson in good breeding to some of the English, this Maharajah; and one or two of the more thoughtful mused unpleasantly on what might happen in India if "college education" turned out goodly numbers of "natives" such as he. His visit to the station, however, was an undoubted success; nothing else was talked of in the whole place, and Mrs. Claude Annesley had "scored" again, and added another to her long list of social triumphs.

Meanwhile, if the truth must be told, the Maharajah himself was undergoing the tortures of the damned. His beautiful manners were with difficulty maintained, his polished grace, his fluent talk, his easy urbanity and apparent calm covered a passion and a rage as fierce as that of any famished tiger. For the *Belle Dame sans Merci* had him in thrall. The strange and subtle languor that lurked in her large pathetic eyes, her delicate and elfin beauty, had run like a swift poison through his Eastern blood and set it on fire. Of what avail? None, he knew; she was as absolutely denied to him as the stars he studied in the hot summer midnights. Nevertheless, he loved her; loved her with a fury and despair that nearly drove him frantic. To approach her made him tremble; the wondering, unconscious, half-wistful looks she gave him made his heart beat to a sense of tears and suffocation. Once, when she by chance dropped a few flowers from her bosom, and he snatched them up stealthily, his act unseen, he thought he must have gone mad with the joy of kissing them. Yet with all this fever at work within him he kept his secret; no hint of it ever escaped him by so much as an unguarded look or tremor of the voice, for he was brave. He had received his death-blow, so he said within himself, but none should see the wound. And he played his part as a manly man should, living his agony down hour by hour heroically, till the last day of his sojourn came, the day fixed by Mrs. Annesley for her grand ball.

This entertainment was to be the climax of the festivities,

and was to outdo everything in the way of balls that had ever been given in the neighbourhood. A splendid pavilion was erected for dancing, the decorations were magnificent, everything was as complete as it could be, and Mrs. Annesley herself was satisfied. Mrs. Annesley, indeed, was in a state of devout thankfulness generally—she was even thankful for her husband. She felt instinctively sure that it was owing to his apparently unobservant observation that Captain Le Marchant had had no lapse into his "habit," and had always passed muster as a gentleman and officer worthy of serving the Queen.

On the evening of the ball and just before it, a grand dinner-party was arranged to take place, at which the Maharajah was not present. From the half-open door of his apartment he saw Idreana descend the stairs, dressed for both dinner and ball, and as he beheld her, himself unseen, his heart sank like an aching weight within him. What was code or caste or anything in the world compared to the desire of possessing this ethereal small woman, clad in her floating white draperies, her gold hair knotted loosely on her neck, and a strange scarlet flower at her bosom! He peered after her, she all unconscious of his anguished gaze, then, withdrawing himself softly he closed the door, and covered his eyes with his hand, ashamed of the great tears that forced their burning ways through his lashes. "The difference of race, the difference of creed, the difference of law," he muttered. "These part man and woman more than God and Nature would ever part them!"

That night, when some twenty or more people sat down to dine at Mrs. Claude Annesley's well-spread table, there could naturally be no stint of wine. The Colonel kept a vigilant eye on Captain Le Marchant, and judged him to be drinking moderately, and keeping well within bounds. Before dessert was quite over the ladies adjourned to the ball-pavilion, and Mrs. Annesley insisted on her husband accompanying them, in order to help her in receiving the already arriving guests. The Maharajah, attired in a dazzling glitter of gold and gems, entered with his attendants, and took his seat in a gilded chair set on a canopied dais for his special honour and accommodation.

The music struck up and the dancing commenced. At the first sound of the band all the other lingerers at the

dinner-table came in, Captain Le Marchant among them. Colonel Annesley, busy assisting his wife as well as he was able, glanced at him as he entered, decided that he was all right, and took no further notice of him. The Captain sauntered about aimlessly for a little, spoke to two or three people, and then left the ball-room again without his departure being noticed. Dancing was soon in full swing, and the tide of swift motion and merriment rose quickly to its height. The Maharajah, sitting enthroned apart, the flashing jewels he wore contrasting singularly with his dark and rather grave features, was entirely absorbed in watching Mrs. Le Marchant dancing. His ardent sombre eyes followed her everywhere as she floated to and fro, round and round, light as thistle-down, with her different partners, the loose knot of glistening hair shining at the back of her white neck, the scarlet flower like a flame on her white bosom.

And as she danced on, he presently descended from the dais, and stood at the side of the pavilion in order to observe her more closely, and also in the hope that haply her white gown might touch him in its silvery whirl, for he felt he could not bear to lose even that possible chance of contact with her. And by-and-by he saw a young subaltern approach her rapidly and say something to her in a low tone. She turned very pale, and her eyes seemed to close, then rousing herself she smiled faintly, murmured some excuse to her partner and hurried away. Led by some instinct, and careless of what might be thought of his also absenting himself, the Maharajah followed. He had the stealthy step of a cat or a panther, and his tread behind her was unheard. She passed out of the ball-pavilion, and along the flower-garlanded corridor which divided it from the house—the young subaltern was with her, and together they entered Mrs. Annesley's dining-room. There, at the half-cleared dinner-table, fallen forward in a sort of stupor, sat Captain Le Marchant, with one empty brandy bottle before him and another half begun. The Maharajah came to a standstill outside the door—he was still unheard and unperceived.

Mrs. Le Marchant went up to the tumbled heap by the table, and put her little white-gloved hand on its shoulder.

"Richard!" she said in a trembling voice, "Richard, don't stay here. Do come away, upstairs, anywhere."

She broke off, and the young sub., somewhat distressed,

tried what he could do. He put his wholesome strong young arm round the disgraceful bundle before him, and said cheerily, "Hullo, Captain! I say, get out of this, you know. You mustn't go to sleep here, they want to lay the supper. Get up, there's a good fellow!"

The bundle stirred and raised itself. A red face showed above a crumpled dress-shirt; two bloodshot eyes opened slowly, and the individual, understood to be an officer and a gentleman, made a vaguely threatening movement of his arms.

"Richard!" murmured his wife again earnestly, "do come upstairs; you are not well, you know. I can easily say you are not well if you will only come upstairs and go to bed. Richard, do come!"

He looked at her stupidly and laughed. She touched his arm entreatingly.

"Richard!" she said, "don't let the Annesleys see you like this!"

With a sudden oath and a savage movement of the body, he clenched his big fist and struck straight out at her white pleading face—a brutal blow that stretched her on the ground senseless. In one second the Maharajah had sprung upon him and pinned him by the throat. Down on the floor he rolled him and knelt upon him, his long, brown, lithe fingers clutching at the thick bull-neck in such a masterly manner that the young subaltern, overcome with confusion and terror, rushed into the ball-room for the Colonel and brought him forth in frantic haste, explaining in a few incoherent words the whole extraordinary situation. The Colonel proved himself a man of action. Flinging himself upon the Maharajah he dragged him away from the prostrate body of Le Marchant.

"Don't you see he's drunk?" he exclaimed. "You can't fight a man who is unable to defend himself. You are neither a coward nor a murderer; you must let him be." Then, seeing Mrs. Le Marchant where she lay senseless, he addressed the pale-faced young subaltern: "Fetch Mrs. Annesley."

The Maharajah stood mute and breathless, with folded arms and flashing eyes. Captain Le Marchant was, with many unsavoury oaths, endeavouring to pick himself up from the ground. The Colonel surveyed the erect proud

figure of the Indian potentate with a look in which military resolve was blended with a good deal of respect.

"Your Highness is my guest," he said calmly, "and I must apologise for laying hands roughly upon you. But you cannot quarrel with a drunkard; the thing is manifestly impossible."

"He has killed his wife!" exclaimed the Maharajah fiercely.

"I think not; but even if he has, that is not your Highness's affair. You have no right to defend an English lady from even the blows of her own lawful husband. Pardon me! You, like myself, are a subject of the Empress; these things are known to you without further explanation."

The Maharajah was silent and immovable for a moment. Then with a slight, haughty bow, he left the room. As he went, he glanced back once, a world of pent-up agony and yearning in his eyes. Mrs. Annesley had hurried in, and was compassionately raising her friend Idreana from the floor, and all that he seemed to see in the air, as he made his way out, was a small pale face, and a scarlet flower.

The affair soon got wind, and the ball that evening came to a hasty and rather disastrous conclusion. Idreana was carried to her room still unconscious; Captain Le Marchant was given an apartment on the other side of the house, where he could swear to his heart's content, and sleep off his brandy potations; and when the morning broke, it found them all more or less haggard and anxious. It was the day of the Maharajah's departure, however, for which Colonel Annesley was secretly thankful, though "Lolly" was in despair that his visit should have had such an untoward termination. Captain Le Marchant woke up sober and furious. He had been attacked by an "Indian beast," he said, and he would shake his "dirty life" out of him. He was still soliloquising in this fashion when Colonel Annesley entered his room.

"Captain Le Marchant, your wife is very ill."

Captain Le Marchant growled something unintelligible.

"You conducted yourself disgracefully last night," went on the Colonel. "I am glad you do not belong to *my* regiment. As a soldier, I am ashamed of you; as a gentlemen, I find you insufferable. You—an English officer—to strike your wife! Good God! what a cowardly act! and what humiliation to us all to think that the Maharajah witnessed it! A

nice impression to give him of our social civilisation! He nearly killed you, by the way; it is fortunate I came in at the moment I did, otherwise he would have done so. He is leaving this morning, and he has asked me to tell you that he wishes to see you before his departure."

"I shan't comply with his wish, then," retorted Le Marchant; "I'll see him damned first!"

"I'll see *you* damned, if you don't!" said the Colonel, with sudden heat and vehemence. "If you refuse to go to him it looks as if you were afraid of him, and, by Jove sir! no British officer shall play the coward *twice* where I am!"

Captain Le Marchant stared, then looked down slightly disconcerted, and pulled his long moustaches.

"Very well," he muttered crossly. "Where is he?"

"In his own rooms, and *alone*," replied the Colonel meaningly. "I may as well tell you that he wishes to apologise."

"Oh!" and Le Marchant laughed. "That alters the case entirely. Rather funny to see him eating humble pie! I'll go at once."

And out he sauntered, whistling carelessly.

"Cad!" commented Colonel Annesley, under his breath. "That poor child Idreana and her 'ideals'! Now, Laura never had any ideals, she says, and that is how she has managed to put up with me."

This idea served him as a favourable theme for meditation, and he went to have a smoke and think it out. Meanwhile, Captain Le Marchant rapped at the door of the Maharajah's apartment.

A servant admitted him, and without a word ushered him into a small interior chamber, where at an open window, looking out on a fair garden below, sat the Maharajah himself. Dismissing his attendant by a sign, he turned his head towards Le Marchant, in acknowledgment of his presence, but made no further salutation or movement to rise. And now, for the first time since his last night's brandy debauch, the Captain began to be ashamed of himself. Fidgety and embarrassed, he felt singularly unable to hold himself with any dignity or display the jaunty air of indifferent ease he desired to assume. He looked about for a chair to sit down on: there was not one in the room save that on which the Maharajah was himself enthroned. And the composed sovereignty of the



Maharajah's attitude, the terrible steadfastness of the Maharajah's eyes, which regarded him with a look wherein hatred, contempt, reproach and wonder were all combined in one dark and piercing flash, began to be distinctly trying to the not over-steady nerves of this particular officer and gentleman. He shifted awkwardly from one foot to the other, and studied the pattern of the floor, finding the atmosphere suddenly warmer than usual. Two minutes, perhaps, passed like this in uncomfortable stillness; then the Maharajah spoke.

"Captain Le Marchant," he said, in low, but very clear accents, "I regret that I attacked you last night when you were unable to defend yourself. Men of my race and caste do not drink, hence we are not always able to realise the degradation of drunkenness in others. I understand that I was wrong. I therefore apologise."

Captain Le Marchant moistened his dry lips and bowed stiffly. The Maharajah went on, still in the same even voice:

"Do you demand further satisfaction, or do you accept this apology?"

The Captain raised his head and endeavoured to look magnanimous, but only succeeded in looking foolish. He cleared his throat and twirled one end of his tawny moustache.

"I accept it," he said, and his voice was husky and uncertain.

The Maharajah's burning glance swept over him like lightning, and a faint, contemptuous smile rested on the proud mouth.

"I wish you to comprehend me perfectly, Captain Le Marchant," he went on. "If I could fight you now that you are capable of fighting, hand to hand, man to man, I would do it! I am ready for it at this moment! It would give me the keenest joy!" His brown hands clenched, his chest heaved. Anon he resumed: "But I cannot. The lady whose cause I would defend, whose sorrows move me to indignation, is your wife; you can do what you will with her—it is your law. I, at any rate, have no right to protect her!"

A shuddering sigh broke from him. Le Marchant stared amazed. A new light dawned upon his mind—a sudden conviction that moved his coarse and flippant nature to a sense of malicious amusement. And now in his excitement the Maharajah rose, fiercely gripping with both hands the carved ivory arm-rests of his chair.

"If I could *buy* your wife from you," he said, his mellow voice quivering with passion, "and save her from another such outrage upon her as that which I witnessed last night, I would give you half my possessions! If I could steal her from you without shame to her or to me, I should be 'uncivilised' enough to do it! Of course you know what this means, and you can make scorn of me if you choose. I am powerless to prevent you. We are a conquered race, and you English despise us. I will not say that we do not merit your contempt—we have allowed ourselves to be kept down under the yoke of evil custom and barbarous superstition for countless ages, and we have never truly discovered our own intellectual force. Perhaps we shall discover it some day—who knows? Yours is a great nation, but men such as you disgrace it. You buy our Indian women, and neglect and ill-treat your own. This I cannot understand. But I waste words. I have made you an apology which you have accepted: so much being clear between us, I ask you one thing before we part for ever—give me your word as a man that the scene of last night shall never be repeated; that you will cherish your wife with the tenderness she merits, and never give her further cause to regret having married you. I have no right to appeal to you, I know, but for once forget this—forget the difference of race and creed between us, and as man to man before the Eternal, give me your promise!"

He spoke with eloquence and earnestness, and as he concluded stretched out his hands with a gesture of entreaty. But Captain Le Marchant was now himself again. He realised the situation completely, and felt he was the master of it. He folded his arms and looked the Maharajah full in the face.

"Your request is most extraordinary," he said coldly and with a haughty stare. "I can promise nothing of the kind—to *you*!"

The Maharajah advanced a step towards him.

"You are a Christian?" he demanded.

Le Marchant bent his head in stiff assent.

"I am often told that Christianity is the one true faith," said the Maharajah with impressive slowness, "the one pure creed. I also have a creed—not Christian. But in my creed there are oaths which bind. Is there nothing in yours which can bind *you*?"

The Captain smiled superciliously, and flicked a little dust off his coat.

"Nothing!" he replied.

With a stifled cry of indignation the Maharajah suddenly drew a dagger from his belt. Poising it aloft he made one tigerish spring forward; then, as swiftly as he had advanced, he drew back, and flung the glittering weapon harmlessly on the ground. Pale and breathless he fixed his glowing eyes full on the startled Captain, who at sight of the lifted sharp steel had recoiled, and pointed imperiously to the door.

"Go!" he said.

And without another word, another look, Le Marchant went.

Two hours later the Maharajah and his suite had departed, with many courteous farewells to Colonel and Mrs. Annesley, and profuse thanks for all the hospitality enjoyed. No special message of any sort was left by the Indian prince for Mrs. Le Marchant beyond a formally expressed regret at her continued indisposition. Nothing ambiguous was said or even hinted, and the "society" that circled round the brilliant "Lolly" was speedily left to itself to discuss the events of the past evening in the usual way that society does discuss things everywhere, propounding utterly erroneous suppositions and arriving at totally wrong conclusions. All the gossips, however, were unanimously correct in observing that "Lolly" herself was singularly silent and subdued, and that what was still more wonderful was, that she appeared to have grown suddenly fond of her husband the Colonel.

That same night, on the shining flat roof of his own palace, a roof which resembled a broad open terrace decked with creepers and flowers, after the style of the ancient Babylonian "hanging gardens," the Maharajah sat alone. Above him the dense blue of the sky arched itself like a dome, pierced through by the golden fire-ball of the Indian moon that sailed slowly along her course with a lazy, languid movement, suggesting voluptuous idleness and sleep. Close by him a great telescope was set up, man's peephole of inquiry at worlds inscrutable, but he did not turn to consult this, the favourite companion of his studies, as was his nightly habitude. He reclined restfully in a low chair, the shield-shape back of which was carved curiously, and studded here

and there with turquoise, on which now and again the moon-rays flashed with a greenish-white glitter. His attitude was one of calm meditation; his eyes dreamily watched the solemn splendour of the midnight heavens. The diamond clasp of his turban scintillated in the moonlight like a stray star fallen out of the clear ether, and the priceless ruby, set as a ring on his right hand, glowed warmly with the hue of blood. He was thinking deeply, and his thoughts were of love, thoughts widely different from those of most men on the same subject.

"Let me not hide this thing from myself," he said half aloud. "It is a sin and it is a glory. It is a sin to love her whom I may not love if I live on to bear that guilty living love towards her, but it is a glory to love if I die, and with myself kill all my erring passion. He—her husband—has guessed, and will most surely tell her of my folly. I saw that in his cruel face. She in her gentle nature will be grieved and pained, perchance she may be offended, and rightly, to think that I should dare to love her and live on. With this fever in my soul, this desire in my blood, my very life insults her. Dead, she will think kindly of me if she thinks at all. Moreover, love is life; without love life is death. What we shall therefore do now, my soul, is to leave this world; we shall learn the news of other worlds best so. To live on and think of her, my pearl, my white lily!—yes, let me call her so once in secret, as if she were indeed mine—to think of her in the pitiless possession of the man who is her husband—this would drive me out of sober reason. Better to forget it and go elsewhere. Love is a mystery which God or the gods only can explain. But of this I am sure—that if a man loves once and truly, he must so love always. Custom and law and creed cannot control it, nothing can change it, nothing can pacify it, nothing can quench the fire burning here"—and he laid one hand on his breast—"except the full possession of the one beloved, and—the other alternative—death. And after death? What shall I find? Myself again with all my sorrow? or God?"

He raised his eyes with a wondering look to the bright moon and stars.

"Worlds unexplored, universes unguessed, mysteries unfathomed!" he murmured—"all vague and vast and inexplicable, yet surely full of promise. There must be *Something*

—something behind the veil, when spirits are stripped of mortality and front each other unafraid! There must be Love—there should be Peace! God! in Thy unknown deeps of Life, let me lose myself and find—Thee!”

Still keeping the same restful, half-reclining attitude, he slowly raised his right hand, and looked thoughtfully at the ruby ring that shone there; then he deliberately placed the splendid jewel between his lips, drawing it in with the lingering delicacy of one who is tasting for the first time some rare and precious cordial. A minute or so elapsed, and he let his hand drop gently again at his side. The ruby centre of the ring was open and showed a small cavity within, a cavity now quite empty.

An hour passed and the Maharajah did not move. Apparently he slept, and a peaceful smile rested on his features. He might have been taken for a figure cast in bronze, he was so very still. The moon sank out of sight, and the pale pink flush of dawn began to spread softly over the horizon. Delicious puffs of fragrance arose from the thousands of flowers and scented shrubs that grew in the fairy-like gardens surrounding the palace, and presently as the morning advanced, the Maharajah's confidential servant appeared according to his usual custom, to bring his master's breakfast and receive his orders for the day. He approached noiselessly, and, with a look of wonder, which quickly deepened into fear, surveyed his lord. He touched his robe—there was no responsive movement of that still figure, majestic in its attitude of proud repose; he called, first softly, then loudly—there was no answer. Falling on his knees, he caught up the inert right hand and saw the ruby ring with its secret cavity open—the ring which he alone of all the household knew had contained the swiftest and deadliest of Eastern poisons. With a cry of horror he sprang up and looked wildly about him, then, realising that all help was unavailing, he fell down again at his master's feet, and there crouching, covered his face and wept despairingly.

Not a hundred miles away a certain “officer and gentleman” was playing off coarse witticisms among his fellows at the expense of “a petty native prince” who had presumed to fall in love with his wife—“an English married woman, by Jove! like his confounded impudence!”—the “petty native

prince" himself being far beyond even the wide-reaching influence of that supreme British scorn which is levied against everything not of its own cult and country. A bright gold point like a lifted spear flashed above the eastern hills—the sun was rising—the faint murmuring of insects and the fluttering of birds' wings stirred the warm and odorous foliage; the light swiftly broadened upwards and fell in ardent waves of heat and splendour over the palace roof and its twisted garlands of flowers, touching with tender warmth the rigid figure seated in grave kingliness beside the great telescope pointed heavenwards; all the gentle and familiar noises of waking life beginning a new day filled the air with their customary sweet monotony. But the silence of the Maharajah was complete, and never to be broken.



CHARLES DICKENS

*The Parish Clerk—A Tale of True Love*  
*Agnes*

The fame of Charles Dickens as a delineator of character began with the publication of *Sketches by Boz* and was firmly established by the appearance of the *Pickwick Papers*. Though fashions in literature change, the appeal of Dickens seems to be immortal.





## THE PARISH CLERK.

### A TALE OF TRUE LOVE

“ONCE upon a time in a very small country town, at a considerable distance from London, there lived a little man named Nathaniel Pipkin, who was the parish clerk of the little town, and lived in a little house in the little High Street, within ten minutes’ walk of the little church; and who was to be found every day from nine till four, teaching a little learning to the little boys. Nathaniel Pipkin was a harmless, inoffensive, good-natured being, with a turned-up nose, and rather turned-in legs: a cast in his eye, and a halt in his gait; and he divided his time between the church and his school, verily believing that there existed not, on the face of the earth, so clever a man as the curate, so imposing an apartment as the vestry-room, or so well-ordered a seminary as his own. Once, and only once, in his life, Nathaniel Pipkin had seen a bishop—a real bishop, with his arms in lawn sleeves, and his head in a wig. He had seen him walk, and heard him talk, at a confirmation, on which momentous occasion Nathaniel Pipkin was so overcome with reverence and awe, when the aforesaid bishop laid his hand on his head, that he fainted right clean away, and was borne out of church in the arms of the beadle.

“This was a great event, a tremendous era, in Nathaniel Pipkin’s life, and it was the only one that had ever occurred to ruffle the smooth current of his quiet existence, when happening one fine afternoon, in a fit of mental abstraction, to raise his eyes from the slate on which he was devising some tremendous problem in compound addition for an offending urchin to solve, they suddenly rested on the blooming countenance of Maria Lobbs, the only daughter of old Lobbs, the great saddler over the way. Now, the eyes of Mr. Pipkin had rested on the pretty face of Maria Lobbs many a time and oft before, at church and elsewhere; but the eyes of

Maria Lobbs had never looked so bright, the cheeks of Maria Lobbs had never looked so ruddy, as upon this particular occasion. No wonder then, that Nathaniel Pipkin was unable to take his eyes from the countenance of Miss Lobbs; no wonder that Miss Lobbs, finding herself stared at by a young man, withdrew her head from the window out of which she had been peeping, and shut the casement and pulled down the blind; no wonder that Nathaniel Pipkin, immediately thereafter, fell upon the young urchin who had previously offended, and cuffed and knocked him about, to his heart's content. All this was very natural, and there's nothing at all to wonder at about it.

"It *is* matter of wonder, though, that any one of Mr. Nathaniel's Pipkin retiring disposition, nervous temperament and most particularly diminutive income, should from this day forth, have dared to aspire to the hand and heart of the only daughter of the fiery old Lobbs—of old Lobbs the great saddler, who could have bought up the whole village at one stroke of his pen, and never felt the outlay—old Lobbs, who was well known to have heaps of money, invested in the bank at the nearest market town—old Lobbs, who was reported to have countless and inexhaustible treasures, hoarded up in the little iron safe with the big key-hole, over the chimney-piece in the back parlour—old Lobbs, who it was well known, on festive occasions garnished his board with a real silver tea-pot, cream-ewer, and sugar-basin, which he was wont, in the pride of his heart, to boast should be his daughter's property when she found a man to her mind. I repeat it, to be matter of profound astonishment and intense wonder, that Nathaniel Pipkin should have had the temerity to cast his eyes in this direction. But love is blind: and Nathaniel had a cast in his eye: and perhaps these two circumstances, taken together, prevented his seeing the matter in its proper light.

"Now, if old Lobbs had entertained the most remote or distant idea of the state of the affections of Nathaniel Pipkin, he would have just razed the school-room to the ground, or exterminated its master from the surface of the earth, or committed some other outrage and atrocity of an equally ferocious and violent description; for he was a terrible old fellow, was Lobbs, when his pride was injured, or his blood was up. Swear! Such trains of oaths would come rolling

and peeling over the way, sometimes, when he was denouncing the idleness of the bony apprentice with the thin legs, that Nathaniel Pipkin would shake in his shoes with horror, and the hair of the pupils' heads would stand on end with fright.

"Well! Day after day, when school was over, and the pupils gone, did Nathaniel Pipkin sit himself down at the front window, and while he feigned to be reading a book, throw sidelong glances over the way in search of the bright eyes of Maria Lobbs; and he hadn't sat there many days, before the bright eyes appeared at an upper window, apparently deeply engaged in reading too. This was delightful, and gladdening to the heart of Nathaniel Pipkin. It was something to sit there for hours together, and look upon that pretty face when the eyes were cast down; but when Maria Lobbs began to raise her eyes from her book, and dart their rays in the direction of Nathaniel Pipkin, his delight and admiration were perfectly boundless. At last, one day when he knew old Lobbs was out, Nathaniel Pipkin had the temerity to kiss his hand to Maria Lobbs; and Maria Lobbs, instead of shutting the window, and pulling down the blind, kissed *hers* to him, and smiled. Upon which, Nathaniel Pipkin determined, that, come what might, he would develop the state of his feelings, without further delay.

"A prettier foot, a gayer heart, a more dimpled face, or a smarter form, never bounded so lightly over the earth they graced, as did those of Maria Lobbs, the old saddler's daughter. There was a roguish twinkle in her sparkling eyes, that would have made its way to far less susceptible bosoms than that of Nathaniel Pipkin; and there was such a joyous sound in her merry laugh, that the sternest misanthrope must have smiled to hear it. Even old Lobbs himself, in the very height of his ferocity, couldn't resist the coaxing of his pretty daughter; and when she, and her cousin Kate—an arch, impudent-looking, bewitching little person—made a dead set upon the old man together, as, to say the truth, they very often did, he could have refused them nothing, even had they asked for a portion of the countless and inexhaustible treasures, which were hidden from the light, in the iron safe.

"Nathaniel Pipkin's heart beat high within him, when he saw this enticing little couple some hundred yards before him one summer's evening, in the very field in which he had many a time strolled about till night-time, and pondered on

the beauty of Maria Lobbs. But though he had often thought then, how briskly he would walk up to Maria Lobbs and tell her of his passion if he could only meet her, he felt now that she was unexpectedly before him, all the blood in his body mounting to his face, manifestly to the great detriment of his legs, which, deprived of their usual portion, trembled beneath him. When they stopped to gather a hedge-flower, or listen to a bird, Nathaniel Pipkin stopped too, and pretended to be absorbed in meditation, as indeed he really was; for he was thinking what on earth he should ever do, when they turned back, as they inevitably must in time, and meet him face to face. But though he was afraid to make up to them, he couldn't bear to lose sight of them; so when they walked faster, he walked faster, when they lingered he lingered, and when they stopped he stopped; and so they might have gone on, until the darkness prevented them, if Kate had not looked slyly back, and encouragingly beckoned Nathaniel to advance. There was something in Kate's manner that was not to be resisted, and so Nathaniel Pipkin complied with the invitation; and after a great deal of blushing on his part, and immoderate laughter on that of the wicked little cousin, Nathaniel Pipkin went down on his knees on the dewy grass, and declared his resolution to remain there for ever, unless he were permitted to rise the accepted lover of Maria Lobbs. Upon this, the merry laughter of Maria Lobbs rang through the calm evening air—without seeming to disturb it, though; it had such a pleasant sound—and the wicked little cousin laughed more immoderately than before, and Nathaniel Pipkin blushed deeper than ever. At length, Maria Lobbs being more strenuously urged by the love-worn little man, turned away her head, and whispered her cousin to say, or at all events Kate *did* say, that she felt much honoured by Mr. Pipkin's addresses; that her hand and heart were at her father's disposal; but that nobody could be insensible to Mr. Pipkin's merits. As all this was said with much gravity, and as Nathaniel Pipkin walked home with Maria Lobbs, and struggled for a kiss at parting, he went to bed a happy man, and dreamed all night long, of softening old Lobbs, opening the strong box, and marrying Maria.

"The next day, Nathaniel Pipkin saw old Lobbs go out upon his old grey pony, and after a great many signs at the

window from the wicked little cousin, the object and meaning of which he could by no means understand, the bony apprentice with the thin legs came over to say that his master wasn't coming home all night, and that the ladies expected Mr. Pipkin to tea, at six o'clock precisely. How the lessons were got through that day, neither Nathaniel Pipkin nor his pupils knew any more than you do; but they were got through somehow, and, after the boys had gone, Nathaniel Pipkin took till full six o'clock to dress himself to his satisfaction. Not that it took long to select the garments he should wear, inasmuch as he had no choice about the matter; but the putting of them on to the best advantage, and the touching of them up previously, was a task of no inconsiderable difficulty or importance.

"There was a very snug little party, consisting of Maria Lobbs and her cousin Kate, and three or four romping, good-humoured, rosy-cheeked girls. Nathaniel Pipkin had ocular demonstration of the fact, that the rumours of old Lobbs's treasures were not exaggerated. There were the real solid silver tea-pot, cream-ewer, and sugar-basin, on the table, and real silver spoons to stir the tea with, and real china cups to drink it out of, and plates of the same, to hold the cakes and toast in. The only eye-sore in the whole place, was another cousin of Maria Lobbs's, and a brother of Kate, whom Maria Lobbs called 'Henry,' and who seemed to keep Maria Lobbs all to himself, up in one corner of the table. It's a delightful thing to see affection in families, but it may be carried rather too far, and Nathaniel Pipkin could not help thinking that Maria Lobbs must be very particularly fond of her relations, if she paid as much attention to all of them as to this individual cousin. After tea, too, when the wicked little cousin proposed a game of blind man's buff, it somehow or other happened that Nathaniel Pipkin was nearly always blind, and whenever he laid his hand upon the male cousin, he was sure to find that Maria Lobbs was not far off. And though the wicked little cousin and the other girls pinched him, and pulled his hair, and pushed chairs in his way, and all sorts of things, Maria Lobbs never seemed to come near him at all; and once—once—Nathaniel Pipkin could have sworn he heard the sound of a kiss, followed by a faint remonstrance from Maria Lobbs, and a half-suppressed laugh from her female friends. All this was odd—very odd—and there is

no saying what Nathaniel Pipkin might or might not have done, in consequence, if his thoughts had not been suddenly directed into a new channel.

"The circumstances which directed his thoughts into a new channel was a loud knocking at the street-door, and the person who made this loud knocking at the street-door, was no other than old Lobbs himself, who had unexpectedly returned, and was hammering away like a coffin-maker: for he wanted his supper. The alarming intelligence was no sooner communicated by the bony apprentice with the thin legs, than the girls tripped up-stairs to Maria Lobbs's bedroom, and the male cousin and Nathaniel Pipkin were thrust into a couple of closets in the sitting-room, for want of any better places of concealment; and when Maria Lobbs and the wicked little cousin had stowed them away, and put the rooms to rights, they opened the street door to old Lobbs, who had never left off knocking since he first began.

"Now it did unfortunately happen that old Lobbs being very hungry was monstrous cross. Nathaniel Pipkin could hear him growling away like an old mastiff with a sore throat; and whenever the unfortunate apprentice with the thin legs came into the room, so surely did old Lobbs commence swearing at him in a most Saracenic and ferocious manner, though apparently with no other end or object than that of easing his bosom by the discharge of a few superfluous oaths. At length some supper, which had been warming up, was placed on the table, and then old Lobbs fell to, in regular style; and having made clear work of it in no time, kissed his daughter, and demanded his pipe.

"Nature had placed Nathaniel Pipkin's knees in very close juxtaposition, but when he heard old Lobbs demand his pipe, they knocked together, as if they were going to reduce each other to powder; for, depending from a couple of hooks, in the very closet in which he stood, was a large brown-stemmed, silver-bowled pipe, which pipe he himself had seen in the mouth of old Lobbs, regularly every afternoon and evening, for the last five years. The two girls went down-stairs for the pipe, and up-stairs for the pipe, and everywhere but where they knew the pipe was, and old Lobbs stormed away meanwhile, in the most wonderful manner. At last he thought of the closet, and walked up to it. It was of no use a little man like Nathaniel Pipkin pulling the door inwards

when a great strong fellow like old Lobbs was pulling it outwards. Old Lobbs gave it one tug and open it flew, disclosing Nathaniel Pipkin standing bolt upright inside, and shaking with apprehension from head to foot. Bless us! what an appalling look old Lobbs gave him, as he dragged him out by the collar, and held him at arm's length.

"'Why, what the devil do you want here?' said old Lobbs, in a fearful voice.

"Nathaniel Pipkin could make no reply, so old Lobbs shook him backwards and forwards, for two or three minutes by way of arranging his ideas for him.

"'What do you want here?' roared Lobbs, 'I suppose *you* have come after my daughter, now?'

"Old Lobbs merely said this as a sneer: for he did not believe that mortal presumption could have carried Nathaniel Pipkin so far. What was his indignation when that poor man replied:

"'Yes, I did, Mr. Lobbs. I did come after your daughter. I love her, Mr. Lobbs.'

"'Why, you snivelling, wry-faced, puny villain,' gasped old Lobbs, paralysed by the atrocious confession; 'what do you mean by that? Say this to my face! Damme, I'll throttle you!'

"It is by no means improbable that old Lobbs would have carried this threat into execution, in the excess of his rage, if his arm had not been stayed by a very unexpected apparition, to wit, the male cousin, who, stepping out of his closet, and walking up to old Lobbs, said:

"'I cannot allow this harmless person, sir, who has been asked here in some girlish frolic, to take upon himself in a very noble manner, the fault (if fault it is) which I am guilty of, and am ready to avow. I love your daughter, sir; and I am here for the purpose of meeting her.'

"Old Lobbs opened his eyes very wide at this, but not wider than Nathaniel Pipkin.

"'You did?' said Lobbs: at last finding breath to speak.

"'I did.'

"'And I forbade you this house, long ago.'

"'You did, or I should not have been here, clandestinely, to-night.'

"I am sorry to record it of old Lobbs, but I think he would have struck the cousin, if his pretty daughter, with



her bright eyes swimming in tears, had not clung to his arm.

“ ‘Don’t stop him, Maria,’ said the young man : ‘if he has the will to strike me, let him. I would not hurt a hair of his grey head, for the riches of the world.’ ”

“The old man cast down his eyes at this reproof, and they met those of his daughter. I have hinted once or twice before, that they were very bright eyes, and, though they were tearful now, their influence was by no means lessened. Old Lobbs turned his head away, as if to avoid being persuaded by them, when, as fortune would have it, he encountered the face of the wicked little cousin, who, half afraid for her brother, and half laughing at Nathaniel Pipkin, presented as bewitching an expression of countenance, with a touch of shyness in it too, as any man, old or young, need look upon. She drew her arm coaxingly through the old man’s, and whispered something in his ear ; and do what he would, old Lobbs couldn’t help breaking out into a smile, while a tear stole down his cheek at the same time.

“Five minutes after this, the girls were brought down from the bedroom with a great deal of giggling and modesty ; and while the young people were making themselves perfectly happy, old Lobbs got down his pipe, and smoked it : and it was a remarkable circumstance about that particular pipe of tobacco, that it was the most soothing and delightful one he ever smoked.

“Nathaniel Pipkin thought it best to keep his own counsel, and by so doing gradually rose into high favour with old Lobbs, who taught him to smoke in time ; and they used to sit out in the garden on the fine evenings, for many years afterwards, smoking and drinking in great state. He soon recovered the effects of his attachment, for we find his name in the parish register, as a witness to the marriage of Maria Lobbs to her cousin ; and it also appears, by reference to other documents, that on the night of the wedding he was incarcerated in the village cage, for having, in a state of extreme intoxication, committed sundry excesses in the streets, in all of which he was aided and abetted by the bony apprentice with the thin legs.”

## AGNES

THE year came round to Christmas-time, and I had been at home above two months. I had seen Agnes frequently. However loud the general voice might be in giving me encouragement, and however fervent the emotions and endeavours to which it roused me, I heard her lightest word of praise as I heard nothing else.

At least once a week, and sometimes oftener, I rode over there, and passed the evening. I usually rode back at night ; for the old unhappy sense was always hovering about me now—most sorrowfully when I left her—and I was glad to be up and out, rather than wandering over the past in weary wakefulness or miserable dreams. I wore away the longest part of many wild sad nights, in those rides ; reviving, as I went, the thoughts that had occupied me in my long absence.

Or, if I were to say rather that I listened to the echoes of those thoughts, I should better express the truth. They spoke to me from afar off. I had put them at a distance, and accepted my inevitable place. When I read to Agnes what I wrote ; when I saw her listening face ; moved her to smiles or tears ; and heard her cordial voice so earnest on the shadowy events of that imaginative world in which I lived ; I thought what a fate mine might have been—but only thought so, as I had thought after I was married to Dora, what I could have wished my wife to be.

My duty to Agnes, who loved me with a love which, if I disquieted, I wronged most selfishly and poorly, and could never restore ; my matured assurance that I, who had worked out my own destiny, and won what I had impetuously set my heart on, had no right to murmur, and must bear ; comprised what I felt and what I had learned. But I loved her : and now it even became some consolation to me, vaguely to conceive a distant day when I might blamelessly avow it ; when all this should be over ; when I could say

"Agnes, so it was when I came home; and now I am old, and I never have loved since!"

She did not once show me any change in herself. What she always had been to me, she still was; wholly unaltered.

Between my aunt and me there had been something, in this connection, since the night of my return, which I cannot call a restraint, or an avoidance of the subject, so much as an implied understanding that we thought of it together, but did not shape our thoughts into words. When, according to our old custom, we sat before the fire at night, we often fell into this train; as naturally, and as consciously to each other, as if we had unreservedly said so. But we preserved an unbroken silence. I believed that she had read, or partly read my thoughts that night; and that she fully comprehended why I gave mine no more distinct expression.

This Christmas-time being come, and Agnes having reposed no new confidence in me, a doubt that had several times arisen in my mind—whether she could have that perception of the true state of my breast, which restrained her with the apprehension of giving me pain—began to oppress me heavily. If that were so, my sacrifice was nothing; my plainest obligation to her unfulfilled; and every poor action I had shrunk from, I was hourly doing. I resolved to set this right beyond all doubt—if such a barrier were between us, to break it down at once with a determined hand.

It was—what lasting reason have I to remember it!—a cold, harsh, winter day. There had been snow, some hours before; and it lay, not deep, but hard-frozen on the ground. Out at sea, beyond my window, the wind blew ruggedly from the north. I had been thinking of it, sweeping over those mountain wastes of snow in Switzerland, then inaccessible to any human foot; and had been speculating which was the lonelier, those solitary regions, or a deserted ocean.

"Riding to-day, Trot?" said my aunt, putting her head in at the door.

"Yes," said I, "I am going over to Canterbury. It's a good day for a ride."

"I hope your horse may think so too," said my aunt; "but at present he is holding down his head and his ears, standing before the door there, as if he thought his stable preferable."

My aunt, I may observe, allowed my horse on the forbidden

ground, but had not at all relented toward the donkeys.

"He will be fresh enough, presently!" said I.

"The ride will do his master good, at all events," observed my aunt, glancing at the papers on my table. "Ah, child, you pass a good many hours here! I never thought, when I used to read books, what work it was to write them."

"It's work enough to read them, sometimes," I returned. "As to the writing, it has its own charms, aunt."

"Ah! I see!" said my aunt. "Ambition, love of approbation, sympathy, and much more, I suppose? Well; go along with you!"

"Do you know anything more," said I, standing composedly before her—she had patted me on the shoulder, and sat down in my chair, "of that attachment of Agnes?"

She looked up in my face a little while, before replying—

"I think I do, Trot."

"Are you confirmed in your impression?" I inquired.

"I think I am, Trot."

She looked so steadfastly at me: with a kind of doubt, or pity, or suspense in her affection: that I summoned the stronger determination to show her a perfectly cheerful face.

"And what is more, Trot——" said my aunt.

"Yes!"

"I think Agnes is going to be married."

"God bless her!" said I cheerfully.

"God bless her!" said my aunt, "and her husband too!"

I echoed it, parted from my aunt, went lightly downstairs, mounted, and rode away. There was greater reason than before to do what I had resolved to do.

How well I recollect the wintry ride! The frozen particles of ice, brushed from the blades of grass by the wind, and borne across my face; the hard clatter of the horse's hoofs, beating a tune upon the ground; the stiff-tilled soil; the snow-drift, lightly eddying in the chalk-pit as the breeze ruffled it; the smoking team with the waggon of old hay, stopping to breathe on the hill-top, and shaking their bells musically; the whitened slopes and sweeps of Down-land lying against the dark sky, as if they were drawn on a huge slate!

I found Agnes alone. The little girls had gone to their own homes now, and she was alone by the fire, reading. She put down her book on seeing me come in; and having

welcomed me as usual, took her work-basket and sat in one of the old-fashioned windows.

I sat beside her on the window-seat, and we talked of what I was doing, and when it would be done, and of the progress I had made since my last visit. Agnes was very cheerful; and laughingly predicted that I should soon become too famous to be talked to, on such subjects.

"So I make the most of the present time, you see," said Agnes, "and talk to you while I may."

As I looked at her beautiful face, observant of her work, she raised her mild clear eyes, and saw that I was looking at her.

"You are thoughtful to-day, Trotwood!"

"Agnes, shall I tell you what about? I came to tell you."

She put aside her work, as she was used to do when we were seriously discussing anything, and gave me her whole attention.

"My dear Agnes, do you doubt my being true to you?"

"No!" she answered, as before.

"Do you remember that I tried to tell you, when I came home, what a debt of gratitude I owed you, dearest Agnes, and how fervently I felt towards you?"

"I remember it," she said gently. "very well."

"You have a secret," said I. "Let me share it, Agnes."

She cast down her eyes, and trembled.

"I could hardly fail to know, even if I had not heard—but from other lips than yours, Agnes, which seems strange—that there is someone upon whom you have bestowed the treasure of your love. Do not shut me out of what concerns your happiness so nearly! If you can trust me, as you say you can, and as I know you may, let me be your friend, your brother, in this matter, of all others!"

With an appealing, almost a reproachful glance, she rose from the window; and hurrying across the room as if without knowing where, put her hands before her face, and burst into such tears as smote me to the heart.

And yet they awakened something in me, bringing promise to my heart. Without my knowing why, these tears allied themselves with the quietly sad smile which was fixed in my remembrance, and shook me more with hope than fear or sorrow.

"Agnes! Sister! Dearest! What have I done?"

"Let me go away, Trotwood. I am not well. I am not myself. I will speak to you by and bye—another time. I will write to you. Don't speak to me now. Don't! don't!"

I sought to recollect what she had said, when I had spoken to her on that former night, of her affection needing no return. It seemed a very world that I must search through in a moment.

"Agnes, I cannot bear to see you so, and think that I have been the cause. My dearest girl, dearer to me than anything in life, if you are unhappy, let me share your unhappiness. If you are in need of help or counsel, let me try to give it to you. If you have indeed a burden on your heart, let me try to lighten it. For whom do I live now, Agnes, if it is not for you!"

"Oh spare me! I am not myself! Another time!" was all I could distinguish.

Was it a selfish error that was leading me away? Or, having once a clue to hope, was there something opening to me that I had not dared to think of?

"I must say more. I cannot let you leave me so! For Heaven's sake, Agnes, let us not mistake each other after all these years, and all that has come and gone with them! I must speak plainly. If you have any lingering thought that I could envy the happiness you will confer; that I could not resign you to a dearer protector, of your own choosing; that I could not, from my removed place, be a contented witness of your joy; dismiss it, for I don't deserve it! I have not suffered quite in vain. You have not taught me quite in vain. There is no alloy of self in what I feel for you."

She was quiet now. In a little time, she turned her pale face towards me and said in a low voice, broken here and there, but very clear.

"I owe it to your pure friendship for me, Trotwood—which, indeed, I do not doubt—to tell you, you are mistaken. I can do no more. If I have sometimes, in the course of years, wanted help and counsel, they have come to me. If I have sometimes been unhappy, the feeling has passed away. If I have ever had a burden on my heart, it has been lightened for me. If I have any secret, it is—no new one; and is—not what you suppose. I cannot reveal it, or divide it. It has long been mine, and must remain mine."

"Agnes! Stay! A moment!"

She was going away, but I detained her. I clasped my

arm about her waist. "In the course of years!" "It is not a new one!" New thoughts and hopes were whirling through my mind, and all the colours of my life were changing.

"Dearest Agnes! Whom I so respect and honour—whom I so devotedly love! When I came here to-day, I thought that nothing could have wrested this confession from me. I thought I could have kept it in my bosom all our lives, till we were old. But, Agnes, if I have indeed any new-born hope that I may ever call you something more than Sister, widely different from Sister——!"

Her tears fell fast; but they were not like those she had lately shed, and I saw my hope brighten in them.

"Agnes! Ever my guide, and best support! If you had been more mindful of yourself, and less of me, when we grew up here together, I think my heedless fancy never would have wandered from you. But you were so much better than I, so necessary to me in every boyish hope and disappointment, that to have you to confide in, and rely upon in everything, became a second nature, supplanting for the time the first and greater one of loving you as I do!"

Still weeping, but not sadly—joyfully! And clasped in my arms as she had never been, as I had thought she never was to be!

"When I loved Dora—fondly, Agnes, as you know——"

"Yes!" she cried earnestly. "I am glad to know it!"

"When I loved her—even then, my love would have been incomplete, without your sympathy. I had it, and it was perfected. And when I lost her, Agnes, what should I have been without you still?"

Closer, in my arms, nearer to my heart, her trembling hand upon my shoulder, her sweet eyes shining through her tears, on mine!

"I went away, dear Agnes, loving you. I stayed away, loving you. I returned home, loving you!"

And now I tried to tell her of the struggle I had had, and the conclusion I had come to. I tried to lay my mind before her, truly and entirely. I tried to show her how I had hoped I had come into the better knowledge of myself, and of her; how I had resigned myself to what that better knowledge brought; and how I had come there, even that day, in my fidelity to this. If she did so love me (I said) that she could

take me for her husband, she could do so, on no deserving of mine, except upon the truth of my love for her, and the trouble which it had ripened to be what it was; and hence it was that I revealed it. And oh, Agnes, even out of thy true eyes, in that same time, the spirit of my child-wife looked upon me, saying it was well; and winning me, through thee, to tenderest recollections of the Blossom that had withered in its bloom!

. . . . .

"I am so blest, Trotwood—my heart is so overcharged—but there is one thing I must say."

"Dearest, what?"

She laid her gentle hands upon my shoulders, and looked calmly in my face.

"Do you know, yet, what it is?"

"I am afraid to speculate on what it is. Tell me, my dear."

"I have loved you all my life!"

. . . . .

Oh, we were happy, we were happy! Our tears were not for the trials (hers so much the greater), through which we had come to be thus, but for the rapture of being thus, never to be divided more!

We walked, that winter evening, in the fields together; and the blessed calm within us seemed to be partaken by the frosty air. The early stars began to shine while we were lingering on, and looking up to them we thanked our God for having guided us to this tranquillity.

We stood together in the same old-fashioned window at night, when the moon was shining; Agnes with her quiet eyes raised up to it; I following her glance. Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and, toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy, forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own.

. . . . .

It was nearly dinner-time next day when we appeared before my aunt. She was up in my study, Peggotty said: which it was her pride to keep in readiness and order for me. We found her, in her spectacles, sitting by the fire.



"Goodness me!" said my aunt, peering through the dusk, "who's this you're bringing home?"

"Agnes," said I.

As we had arranged to say nothing at first, my aunt was not a little discomfited. She darted a hopeful glance at me, when I said "Agnes"; but seeing that I looked as usual, she took off her spectacles in despair, and rubbed her nose with them.

She greeted Agnes heartily, nevertheless; and we were soon in the lighted parlour downstairs, at dinner. My aunt put on her spectacles twice or thrice, to take another look at me, but as often took them off again, disappointed, and rubbed her nose with them—much to the discomfiture of Mr. Dick, who knew this to be a bad symptom.

"By the bye, aunt," said I, after dinner, "I have been speaking to Agnes about what you told me."

"Then, Trot," said my aunt, turning scarlet, "you did wrong, and broke your promise."

"You are not angry, aunt, I trust? I am sure you won't be, when you learn that Agnes is not unhappy in any attachment."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said my aunt.

As my aunt appeared to be annoyed, I thought the best way was to cut her annoyance short. I took Agnes in my arm to the back of her chair, and we both leaned over her. My aunt, with one clap of her hands, and one look through her spectacles, immediately went into hysterics, for the first and only time in all my knowledge of her.

The hysterics called up Peggotty. The moment my aunt was restored, she flew at Peggotty, and calling her a silly old creature, hugged her with all her might. After that, she hugged Mr. Dick (who was highly honoured, but a good deal surprised); and after that, told them why. Then we were all happy together.

I could not discover whether my aunt, in her last short conversation with me, had fallen on a pious fraud, or had really mistaken the state of my mind. It was quite enough, she said, that she had told me Agnes was going to be married; and that I now knew better than anyone how true it was.

We were married within a fortnight. Traddles and Sophy, and Doctor and Mrs. Strong, were the only guests at our

quiet wedding. We left them full of joy ; and drove away together. Clapsed in my embrace, I held the source of every worthy aspiration I had ever had ; the centre of myself, the circle of my life, my own, my wife ; my love of whom was founded on a rock !

“Dearest husband ! ” said Agnes. “Now that I may call you by that name, I have one thing more to tell you.”

“Let me hear it, love.”

“It grows out of the night when Dora died. She sent you for me.”

“She did.”

“She told me that she left me something. Can you think what it was ? ”

I believed I could. I drew the wife who had so long loved me, closer to my side.

“She told me that she made a last request to me, and left me a last charge.”

“And it was——”

“That only I would occupy this vacant place.”

And Agnes laid her head upon my breast, and wept ; and I wept with her, though we were so happy.



## ANTHONY TROLLOPE

### *A Love Scene*

Anthony Trollope was for many years a Post Office Surveyor in Ireland, where he acquired the taste for hunting which is revealed in many of his stories. He was an indefatigable writer, publishing forty-seven novels, the majority of them with political or ecclesiastical settings. It is on the latter—the Barchester series—that his fame is principally based.



## A LOVE SCENE

"It's good to be off with the auld luvie  
Before ye be on wi' the new."

OF the wisdom of this maxim Mr. Slope was ignorant, and accordingly having written his letter to Mrs. Bold, he proceeded to call upon the Signora Neroni. Indeed it was hard to say which was the old love and which the new, Mr. Slope having been smitten with both so nearly at the same time. Perhaps he thought it not amiss to have two strings to his bow. But two strings to Cupid's bow are always dangerous to him on whose behalf they are to be used. A man should remember that between two stools he may fall to the ground.

But in sooth Mr. Slope was pursuing Mrs. Bold in obedience to his better instincts, and the signora in obedience to his worsor. Had he won the widow and worn her, no one could have blamed him. You, O reader, and I and Eleanor's other friends would have received the story of such a winning with much disgust and disappointment; but we should have been angry with Eleanor, not with Mr. Slope. Bishop, male and female, dean and chapter and diocesan clergy in full congress, could have found nothing to disapprove of in such an alliance. Convocation itself, that mysterious and mighty synod, could in no wise have fallen foul of it. The possession of £1000 a year and a beautiful wife would not at all have hurt the voice of the pulpit charmer, or lessened the grace and piety of the exemplary clergyman.

But not of such a nature were likely to be his dealings with the Signora Neroni. In the first place he knew that her husband was living, and therefore he could not woo her honestly. Then again she had nothing to recommend her to his honest wooing had such been possible. She was not only portionless, but also from misfortune unfitted to be chosen as the wife of any man who wanted a useful mate. Mr. Slope was aware that she was a helpless hopeless cripple.

But Mr. Slope could not help himself. He knew that he was wrong in devoting his time to the back drawing-room in Dr. Stanhope's house. He knew that what took place there would if divulged utterly ruin him with Mrs. Bold. He knew that scandal would soon come upon his heels and spread abroad among the black coats of Barchester some tidings, exaggerated tidings, of the sighs which he poured into the lady's ears. He knew that he was acting against the recognised principles of his life, against those laws of conduct by which he hoped to achieve much higher success. But as we have said, he could not help himself. Passion, for the first time in his life, passion was too strong for him.

As for the signora, no such plea can be put forward for her, for in truth she cared no more for Mr. Slope than she did for twenty others who had been at her feet before him. She willingly, nay greedily, accepted his homage. He was the finest fly that Barchester had hitherto afforded to her web; and the signora was a powerful spider that made wondrous webs, and could in no way live without catching flies. Her taste in this respect was abominable, for she had no use for the victims when caught. She could not eat them matrimonially, as young lady spiders do whose webs are most frequently of their mothers' weaving. Nor could she devour them by any escapade of a less legitimate description. Her unfortunate affliction precluded her from all hope of levitating with a lover. It would be impossible to run away with a lady who required three servants to move her from a sofa.

The signora was subdued by no passion. Her time for love was gone. She had lived out her heart, such heart as she had ever had, in her early years, at an age when Mr. Slope was thinking of the second book of Euclid and his unpaid bill at the buttery hatch. In age the lady was younger than the gentleman; but in feelings, in knowledge of the affairs of love, in intrigue, he was immeasurably her junior. It was necessary to her to have some man at her feet. It was the one customary excitement of her life. She delighted in the exercise of power which this gave her; it was now nearly the only food for her ambition; she would boast to her sister that she could make a fool of any man, and the sister, as little imbued with feminine delicacy as herself, good naturedly thought it but fair that such amusement should

be afforded to a poor invalid who was debarred from the ordinary pleasures of life.

Mr. Slope was madly in love, but hardly knew it. The signora spitted him, as a boy does a cockchafer on a cork, that she might enjoy the energetic agony of his gyrations. And she knew very well what she was doing.

Mr. Slope having added to his person all such adornments as are possible to a clergyman making a morning visit, such as a clean necktie, clean handkerchief, new gloves, and a *soupeon* of not unnecessary scent, called about three o'clock at the doctor's door. At about this hour the signora was almost always alone in the back drawing-room. The mother had not come down. The doctor was out or in his own room. Bertie was out, and Charlotte at any rate left the room if any one called whose object was specially with her sister. Such was her idea of being charitable and sisterly.

Mr. Slope, as was his custom, asked for Mr. Stanhope, and was told, as was the servant's custom, that the signora was in the drawing-room. Upstairs he accordingly went. He found her, as he always did, lying on her sofa with a French volume before her, and a beautiful little inlaid writing case open on her table. At the moment of his entrance she was in the act of writing.

"Ah, my friend," said she, putting out her left hand to him across her desk, "I did not expect you to-day and was this very instant writing to you——"

Mr. Slope, taking the soft fair delicate hand in his, and very soft and fair and delicate it was, bowed over it his huge red head and kissed it. It was a sight to see, a deed to record if the author could fitly do it, a picture to put on canvas. Mr. Slope was big, awkward, cumbrous, and having his heart in his pursuit was ill at ease. The lady was fair, as we have said, and delicate; everything about her was fine and refined; her hand in his looked like a rose lying among carrots, and when he kissed it he looked as a cow might do on finding such a flower among her food. She was graceful as a couchant goddess, and, moreover, as self-possessed as Venus must have been when courting Adonis.

Oh, that such grace and such beauty should have condescended to waste itself on such a pursuit!

"I was in the act of writing to you," said she, "but now my scrawl may go into the basket;" and she raised the sheet



of gilded notepaper from off her desk as though to tear it.

"Indeed it shall not," said he, laying the embargo of half a stone weight of human flesh and blood upon the devoted paper. "Nothing that you write for my eyes, signora, shall be so desecrated," and he took up the letter, put that also among the carrots and fed on it, and then proceeded to read it.

"Gracious me! Mr. Slope," said she, "I hope you don't mean to say that you keep all the trash I write to you. Half my time I don't know what I write, and when I do, I know it is only fit for the back of the fire. I hope you have not that ugly trick of keeping letters."

"At any rate, I don't throw them into the waste-paper basket. If destruction is their doomed lot, they perish worthily, and are burnt on a pyre, as Dido was of old."

"With a steel pen stuck through them, of course," said she, "to make the simile more complete. Of all the ladies of my acquaintance I think Lady Dido was the most absurd. Why did she not do as Cleopatra did? Why did she not take out her ships and insist on going with him? She could not bear to lose the land she had got by a swindle; and then she could not bear the loss of her lover. So she fell between two stools. Mr. Slope, whatever you do, never mingle love and business."

Mr. Slope blushed up to his eyes, and over his mottled forehead to the very roots of his hair. He felt sure that the signora knew all about his intentions with reference to Mrs. Bold. His conscience told him that he was detected. His doom was to be spoken; he was to be punished for his duplicity, and rejected by the beautiful creature before him. Poor man. He little dreamt that had all his intentions with reference to Mrs. Bold been known to the signora, it would only have added zest to that lady's amusement. It was all very well to have Mr. Slope at her feet, to show her power by making an utter fool of a clergyman, to gratify her own infidelity by thus proving the little strength which religion had in controlling the passions even of a religious man; but it would be an increased gratification if she could be made to understand that she was at the same time alluring her victim away from another, whose love if secured would be in every way beneficent and salutary.

The signora had indeed discovered with the keen instinct

of such a woman, that Mr. Slope was bent on matrimony with Mrs. Bold, but in alluding to Dido she had not, thought of it. She instantly perceived, however, from her lover's blushes, what was on his mind, and was not slow in taking advantage of it.

She looked him full in the face, not angrily, nor yet with a smile, but with an intense and overpowering gaze; and then holding up her forefinger, and slightly shaking her head, she said —

“Whatever you do, my friend, do not mingle love and business. Either stick to your treasure and your city of wealth, or else follow your love like a true man. But never attempt both. If you do, you'll have to die with a broken heart as did poor Dido. Which is it to be with you, Mr. Slope, love or money?”

Mr. Slope was not so ready with a pathetic answer as he usually was with touching episodes in his extempore sermons. He felt that he ought to say something pretty, something also that should remove the impression on the mind of his lady-love. But he was rather put about how to do it.

“Love,” said he, “true overpowering love, must be the strongest passion a man can feel; it must control every other wish, and put aside every other pursuit. But with me love will never act in that way unless it be returned;” and he threw upon the signora a look of tenderness which was intended to make up for all the deficiencies of his speech.

“Take my advice,” said she. “Never mind love. After all, what is it? The dream of a few weeks. That is all its joy. The disappointment of a life is its Nemesis. Who was ever successful in true love? Success in love argues that the love is false. True love is always despondent or tragical. Juliet loved, Haidee loved, Dido loved, and what came of it? Troilus loved and ceased to be a man.”

“Troilus loved and was fooled,” said the more manly chaplain. “A man may love and yet not be a Troilus. All women are not Cressids.”

“No; all women are not Cressids. The falsehood is not always on the women's side. Imogen was true, but how was she rewarded? Her lord believed her to be the paramour of the first he who came near her in his absence. Desdemona was true and was smothered. Ophelia was true

and went mad. There is no happiness in love, except at the end of an English novel. But in wealth, money, houses, lands, goods and chattels, in the good things of this world, yes, in them there is something tangible, something that can be retained and enjoyed."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Slope, feeling himself bound to enter some protest against so very unorthodox a doctrine, "this world's wealth will make no one happy."

"And what will make you happy—you—you?" said she, raising herself up, and speaking to him with energy across the table. "From what source do you look for happiness? Do not say that you look for none. I shall not believe you. It is a search in which every human being spends an existence."

"And the search is always in vain," said Mr. Slope. "We look for happiness on earth, while we ought to be content to hope for it in heaven."

"Pshaw! you preach a doctrine which you know you don't believe. It is the way with you all. If you know that there is no earthly happiness, why do you long to be a bishop or a dean? Why do you want lands and income?"

"I have the natural ambition of a man," said he.

"Of course you have, and the natural passions; and therefore I say that you don't believe the doctrine you preach. St. Paul was an enthusiast. He believed so that his ambition and passions did not war against his creed. So does the Eastern fanatic who passes half his life erect upon a pillar. As for me, I will believe in no belief that does not make itself manifest by outward signs. I will think no preaching sincere that is not recommended by the practice of the preacher."

Mr. Slope was startled and horrified, but he felt that he could not answer. How could he stand up and preach the lessons of his Master, being there as he was, on the devil's business? He was a true believer, otherwise this would have been nothing to him. He had audacity for most things, but he had not audacity to make a plaything of the Lord's word. All this the signora understood, and felt much interest as she saw her cockchafer whirl round upon her pin.

"Your wit delights in such arguments," said he, "but your heart and your reason do not go along with them."

"My heart!" said she; "you quite mistake the principles

of my composition if you imagine that there is such a thing about me." After all, there was very little that was false in anything that the signora said. If Mr. Slope allowed himself to be deceived, it was his own fault. Nothing could have been more open than her declarations about herself.

The little writing-table with her desk was still standing before her, a barrier, as it were, against the enemy. She was sitting as nearly upright as she ever did, and he had brought a chair close to the sofa, so that there was only the corner of the table between him and her. It so happened that as she spoke her hand lay upon the table, and as Mr. Slope answered her he put his hand upon hers.

"No heart!" said he. "That is a heavy charge which you bring against yourself, and one of which I cannot find you guilty——"

She withdrew her hand, not quickly and angrily, as though insulted by his touch, but gently and slowly.

"You are in no condition to give a verdict on the matter," said she, "as you have not tried me. No; don't say that you intend doing so, for you know you have no intention of the kind; nor indeed have I either. As for you, you will take your vows where they will result in something more substantial than the pursuit of such a ghostlike, ghostly love as mine——"

"Your love should be sufficient to satisfy the dream of a monarch," said Mr. Slope, not quite clear as to the meaning of his words.

"Say an archbishop, Mr. Slope," said she. Poor fellow! she was very cruel to him. He went round again upon his cork on this allusion to his profession. He tried, however, to smile, and gently accused her of joking on a matter which was, he said, to him of such vital moment.

"Why—what gulls do you men make of us," she replied. "How you fool us to the top of our bent; and of all men you clergymen are the most fluent of your honeyed caressing words. Now look me in the face, Mr. Slope, boldly and openly."

Mr. Slope did look at her with a languishing loving eye, and as he did so, he against put forth his hand to get hold of hers.

"I told you to look at me boldly, Mr. Slope; but confine your boldness to your eyes."

"Oh, Madeline!" he sighed.

"Well, my name is Madeline," said she; "but none except my own family usually call me so. Now look me in the face, Mr. Slope. Am I to understand that you say you love me?"

Mr. Slope never had said so. If he had come there with any formed plan at all, his intention was to make love to the lady without uttering any such declaration. It was, however, quite impossible that he should now deny his love. He had, therefore, nothing for it, but to go down on his knees distractedly against the sofa, and swear that he did love her with a love passing the love of man.

The signora received the assurance with very little palpitation or appearance of surprise. "And now answer me another question," said she; "when are you to be married to my dear friend Eleanor Bold?"

Poor Mr. Slope went round and round in mortal agony. In such a condition as his it was really very hard for him to know what answer to give. And yet no answer would be his surest condemnation. He might as well at once plead guilty to the charge brought against him.

"And why do you accuse me of such dissimulation?" said he.

"Dissimulation! I said nothing of dissimulation. I made no charge against you, and make none. Pray don't defend yourself to me. You swear that you are devoted to my beauty, and yet you are on the eve of matrimony with another. I feel this to be rather a compliment. It is to Mrs. Bold that you must defend yourself. That you may find difficult; unless, indeed, you can keep her in the dark. You clergymen are cleverer than other men."

"Signora, I have told you that I loved you, and now you rail at me?"

"Rail at you. God bless the man; what would he have? Come, answer me this at your leisure, not without thinking now, but leisurely and with consideration. Are you not going to be married to Mrs. Bold?"

"I am not," said he. And as he said it, he almost hated, with an exquisite hatred, the woman whom he could not help loving with an exquisite love.

"But surely you are a worshipper of hers?"

"I am not," said Mr. Slope, to whom the word worshipper

was peculiarly distasteful. The signora had conceived that it would be so.

"I wonder at that," said she. "Do you not admire her? To my eye she is the perfection of English beauty. And then she is rich too. I should have thought she was just the person to attract you. Come, Mr. Slope, let me give you advice on this matter. Marry the charming widow; she will be a good mother to your children, and an excellent mistress of a clergyman's household."

"Oh, signora, how can you be so cruel?"

"Cruel," said she, changing the voice of banter which she had been using for one which was expressively earnest in its tone; "is that cruelty?"

"How can I love another, while my heart is entirely your own?"

"If that were cruelty, Mr. Slope, what might you say of me if I were to declare that I returned your passion? What would you think if I bound you even by a lover's oath to do daily penance at this couch of mine? What can I give in return for a man's love? Ah, dear friend, you have not realised the conditions of my fate."

Mr. Slope was not on his knees all this time. After his declaration of love he had risen from them as quickly as he thought consistent with the new position which he now filled, and as he stood was leaning on the back of his chair. This outburst of tenderness on the signora's part quite overcame him, and made him feel for the moment that he could sacrifice everything to be assured of the love of the beautiful creature before him, maimed, lame, and already married as she was.

"And can I not sympathise with your lot?" said he, now seating himself on her sofa, and pushing away the table with his foot.

"Sympathy is so near to pity!" said she. "If you pity me, cripple as I am, I shall spurn you from me."

"Oh, Madeline, I will only love you," and again he caught her hand and devoured it with kisses. Now she did not draw it from him, but sat there as he kissed it, looking at him with her great eyes, just as a great spider would look at a great fly that was quite securely caught.

"Suppose Signor Neroni were to come to Barchester," said she, "would you make his acquaintance?"

"Signor Neroni!" said he.

"Would you introduce him to the bishop, and Mrs. Proudie, and the young ladies?" said she, again having recourse to that horrid quizzing voice which Mr. Slope so particularly hated.

"Why do you ask such a question?" said he.

"Because it is necessary that you should know that there is a Signor Neroni. I think you had forgotten it."

"If I thought that you retained for that wretch one particle of the love of which he was never worthy, I would die before I would distract you by telling you what I feel. No! were your husband the master of your heart, I might perhaps love you; but you should never know it."

"My heart again! how you talk. And you consider then, that if a husband be not master of his wife's heart, he has no right to her fealty; if a wife ceases to love, she may cease to be true. Is that your doctrine on this matter, as a minister of the Church of England?"

Mr. Slope tried hard within himself to cast off the pollution with which he felt that he was defiling his soul. He strove to tear himself away from the noxious siren that had bewitched him. But he could not do it. He could not be again heart free. He had looked for rapturous joy in loving this lovely creature, and he already found that he met with little but disappointment and self-rebuke. He had come across the fruit of the Dead Sea, so sweet and delicious to the eye, so bitter and nauseous to the taste. He had put the apple to his mouth, and it had turned to ashes between his teeth. Yet he could not tear himself away. He knew, he could not but know, that she jeered at him, ridiculed his love, and insulted the weakness of his religion. But she half permitted his adoration, and that half permission added such fuel to his fire that all the fountain of his piety could not quench it. He began to feel savage, irritated, and revengeful. He meditated some severity of speech, some taunt that should cut her, as her taunts cut him. He reflected as he stood there for a moment, silent before her, that if he desired to quell her proud spirit, he should do so by being prouder even than herself; that if he wished to have her at his feet suppliant for his love it behoved him to conquer her by indifference. All this passed through his mind. As far as dead knowledge went, he knew, or thought he knew, how a woman should

be tamed. But when he essayed to bring his tactics to bear, he failed like a child. What chance has dead knowledge with experience in any of the transactions between man and man? What possible chance between man and woman? Mr. Slope loved furiously, insanely and truly; but he had never played the game of love. The signora did not love at all, but she was up to every move of the board. It was Philidor pitted against a school-boy.

And so she continued to insult him, and he continued to bear it.

"Sacrifice the world for love!" said she, in answer to some renewed vapid declaration of his passion; "how often has the same thing been said, and how invariably with the same falsehood!"

"Falsehood," said he. "Do you say that I am false to you? do you say that my love is not real?"

"False? of course, it is false, false as the father of falsehood—if indeed falsehoods need a sire, and are not self-begotten since the world began. You are ready to sacrifice the world for love? Come, let us see what you will sacrifice. I care nothing for nuptial vows. The wretch, I think you were kind enough to call him so, whom I swore to love and obey, is so base that he can only be thought of with repulsive disgust. In the council chamber of my heart I have divorced him. To me that is as good as though aged lords had gloated for months over the details of his licentious life. I care nothing for what the world can say. Will you be as frank? Will you take me to your home as you wife? Will you call me Mrs. Slope before bishop, dean, and prebendaries?" The poor tortured wretch stood silent, not knowing what to say. "What! you won't do that. Tell me, then, what part of the world is it that you will sacrifice for my charms?"

"Were you free to marry, I would take you to my house to-morrow and wish no higher privilege."

"I am free," said she, almost starting up in her energy. For though there was no truth in her pretended regard for her clerical admirer, there was a mixture of real feeling in the scorn and satire with which she spoke of love and marriage generally. "I am free; free as the winds. Come; will you take me as I am? Have your wish; sacrifice the world, and prove yourself a true man."

Mr. Slope should have taken her at her word. She would



have drawn back, and he would have had the full advantage of the offer. But he did not. Instead of doing so, he stood wrapt in astonishment, passing his fingers through his lank red hair, and thinking as he stared upon her animated countenance that her wondrous beauty grew more and more wonderful as he gazed on it. "Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed out loud. "Come, Mr. Slope; don't talk of sacrificing the world again. People beyond one-and-twenty should never dream of such a thing. You and I, if we have the dregs of any love left in us, if we have the remnants of a passion remaining in our hearts, should husband our resources better. We are not in our *première jeunesse*. The world is a very nice place. Your world, at any rate, is so. You have all manner of fat rectories to get, and possible bishoprics to enjoy. Come, confess; on second thoughts you would not sacrifice such things for the smiles of a lame lady?"

It was impossible for him to answer this. In order to be in any way dignified, he felt that he must be silent.

"Come," said she—"don't boody with me: don't be angry because I speak out some home truths. Alas, the world, as I have found it, has taught me bitter truths. Come, tell me that I am forgiven. Are we not to be friends?" and she again put out her hand to him.

He sat himself down in the chair beside her, and took her proffered hand and leant over her.

"There," said she, with her sweetest, softest smile—a smile to withstand which a man should be cased in triple steel, "there; seal your forgiveness on it," and she raised it towards his face. He kissed it again and again, and stretched over her as though desirous of extending the charity of his pardon beyond the hand that was offered to him. She managed, however, to check his ardour. For one so easily allured as this poor chaplain, her hand was surely enough.

"Oh, Madeline!" said he, "tell me that you love me—do you—do you love me?"

"Hush," said she. "There is my mother's step. Our *fête-à-fête* has been of monstrous length. Now you had better go. But we shall see you soon again, shall we not?"

Mr. Slope promised that he would call again on the following day.

"And, Mr. Slope," she continued, "pray answer my note. You have it in your hand, though I declare during these

two hours you have not been gracious enough to read it. It is about the Sabbath school and the children. You know how anxious I am to have them here. I have been learning the catechism myself, on purpose. You must manage it for me next week. I will teach them; at any rate, to submit themselves to their spiritual pastors and masters."

Mr. Slope said but little on the subject of Sabbath schools, but he made his adieu, and betook himself home with a sad heart, troubled mind, and uneasy conscience.



## RAFAEL SABATINI

*By Ancient Custom*

Rafael Sabatini was born in Italy, which is the scene of many of his brilliant historical romances, but came to England at an early age. Among the best-known of his creations are Scaramouche and Captain Blood.



## BY ANCIENT CUSTOM

THE Sire Tristan de Beloeil standing upon the threshold of Eternity considered perhaps for the first time since his birth, twenty-five years ago, how much there was in life which could not be left without regret.

Well-born and well-dowered, comely of face, tall and vigorous of body, the world's best gifts had lain within his easy reach and there had been on his part no reluctance or niggardliness in making them his own.

The priest who had been sent to shrive him, and who had just departed, might be correctly informed in the matter of the Hereafter, which he had described in such alluring terms. But it seemed to the Sire Tristan that the priest took a good deal for granted; and for his own part he was content enough with the world of men and would prefer to continue to inhabit it, postponing until much later the enjoyment of the delights of Paradise to which the hangman was to despatch him in the morning.

He leaned on the stone sill of the solidly-barred window of his prison in the Gravensteen of Ghent, and contemplated the sunset. He was not likely to contemplate another, since only the powers of Joshua could postpone the doom which its circling would bring him in the next twelve hours. He took his head in his hands, thrusting his fingers deep into his golden mane, and so far forgot the admirable stoicism which had hitherto supported him as to permit himself a sob. Never had life seemed so sweet and desirable as now that by the justice of the great Duke of Burgundy he was to forfeit it. This justice, he thought, had been too harshly administered by the Ducal Lieutenant in Ghent. He realised that a certain severity is expedient in legislating for a subject people, especially when they are as stubborn and turbulent as the Ghenters who had given the Duke trouble almost from the very hour of his accession. But even a ducal lieutenant should

not disregard the claims which the laws of honour make upon a gentleman of birth, and allowances should be made whenever these laws are in conflict with no less arbitrary ducal enactments. It was true that the Sire Tristan had grievously wounded a man, and equally true that deeds of blood were of all offences those which the ducal lieutenants, operating so briskly with sack and cord throughout the Duke's wide dominions, were instructed to punish most rigorously. But, after all, this had been no act of brigandage, or scoundrel violence. He had fought honourably with Conrad van der Schuylen, and it was monstrous that he should be required to pay for it by dying a felon's death.

Yet if the Ducal Lieutenant of Ghent, the wooden-faced Sire de Vauvenargues, had confined himself in his judgment to the naked fact and taken no account of its clothing circumstances, the fault was largely the Sire Tristan's own. He had stubbornly refused to inform the court of the grounds of the quarrel, arrogantly claiming that he was within his rights to engage in single combat whenever honour should demand it.

"How," the Ducal Lieutenant had asked him, not unreasonably, "are we to judge that honour demanded it in this instance unless you disclose the grounds upon which you quarrelled?"

The Sire Tristan, however, would not yield the point. "It is a gentleman's right to quarrel upon any grounds he pleases. The present grounds are such as I cannot publish without committing a disloyalty. It is in your knowledge that I did not fall upon Messire Van der Schuylen unawares, like an assassin; therefore you cannot deal with me as with a common murderer."

But the court showed him that it could. If he would not defend himself in what the court accounted proper terms, the court must assume that he had no proper defence. Van der Schuylen's turn would come later, when and if he recovered sufficiently to stand his trial. Perhaps he would be less obstinate. Perhaps he would have less cause so to be. Thus, the Ducal Lieutenant, who thereupon proceeded calmly to pass sentence of death upon the Sire Tristan de Beloeil, as an example to all men who might be disposed to practise turbulence within the ducal dominions.

The Sire Tristan was sprung from a family of some consequence, and this family exerted itself vigorously, urging as a

last plea its ancient blood as a reason why execution should be stayed until appeal could be made to the Duke's Highness in person. But the Ducal Lieutenant met the plea with that monstrous falsehood of all time, that in the eyes of the law all men are equal, and that, therefore, no appeal to the Duke could avail. Thereafter, an advocate had arisen in the grey justice chamber of the Gravensteen to offer on behalf of some person or persons unnamed, to ransom the prisoner by the payment of any reasonable fine which the Ducal Lieutenant might see fit to impose as an alternative.

He was curtly informed that the justice of Burgundy was not for sale, and the Sire Tristan was conducted back to his prison there to prepare himself for his end. He was not even to have the satisfaction of knowing what stout generous friend had sent that advocate before the court with his amazing offer. The Sire Tristan possessed many friends; but he could think of none whose love for him would have gone to quite such lengths. The failure of that attempt closed the last door on hope, and nothing now remained but to prepare himself for to-morrow's grim journey with the best courage he could command.

They kept him waiting next day until noon, thereby subjecting him to a torment of hope. He perceived the reason when at last they brought him forth from the palace-fortress, which once had been the castle of the Counts of Flanders and conducted him through the mean alleys of the Oudeburg, to the great square where the scaffold was erected in the shadow of that Belfry which was regarded by the burghers as the monument of their power and wealth. The Ducal Lieutenant had chosen the hour when the noon bell summoned the forty thousand weavers of Ghent from their looms to the mid-day meal. They were a turbulent stubbornly independent class, these weavers, ever ready in defence of liberty to exchange the shuttle for the pike. Their numbers and cohesion made them formidable, wherefore the Sire de Vauvenargues deemed it well to miss no opportunity of intimidating them by a display of the iron hand of Burgundy. The hour of deserted looms was deliberately chosen so that all Ghent might be free to witness this operation of Burgundian justice upon a well-born disturber of the peace.

Under a strong guard of archers, upon the breasts of whose white surcoats was displayed the Burgundian badge of the



St. Andrew's Cross, came the Sire Tristan de Beloeil marching briskly to his doom. He carried himself erect, his face composed if pale, and he had dressed himself in his best as if for a bridal, accounting that his birth and blood demanded that he should make as brave a show as possible on this his last appearance.

His pourpoint was of red velvet, tapering gracefully to the waist, laced in gold across the wedge of snowy undergarment showing at the breast; his hose was parti-coloured, red and white, his long boots of fine red Spanish leather, turned over at the tops.

Beholding him so young and so comely, so elegant and so intrepid, the crowd was moved to general compassion, whilst here and there the feeling became allied with indignation that he should suffer a felon's death for a deed which no equitable justice would have regarded as felonious.

The Sire Tristan was bareheaded, and the abundant hair, which hung to the nape of his neck, was so lustrously golden that an aureole of light seemed to glow about it, as it reflected the sunlight of that fair April noon. This was observed by some and pointed out as a portent, a sign of heavenly grace, a prognostic of beatitude to be earned him by his approaching martyrdom. A woman was the first to voice it.

"There is a nimbus about his head!" she cried. "It is a sign!"

Another took up the cry and amplified it: "There is a throne awaiting him in Heaven, the dear young saint."

Why, this assurance growing amongst them, they should have desired to prevent the Sire Tristan, for whom there was certainly no throne on earth, from at once fulfilling so splendid a celestial destiny, is not readily apparent. But crowds are moved by emotion; and emotion is rarely the friend of logic. The people began to mutter, to protest against this hanging, and, at last, to jostle and hinder the archers of the guard, so that these were forced to employ their staves, to thrust back the press and open a way to the gallows.

The Sire de Vauvenargues, looking on from a balcony of the Stadhuis, began to ask himself if he had been wise in choosing an hour when the streets were thronged. If a riot were to ensue, his harsh master, the Duke, would ask a stern account of him for the event and the dispositions which had made it possible. There was, however, no riot. Before the

uncompromising attitude of the Burgundian archers and the resolute wielding of their staves, the crowd permitted prudence to override compassion. Had the Sire Tristan been a Ghenter it might have fallen out differently. But he was comparatively a stranger there, a gentleman of Hainault, and, after all, there was no reason why men of Ghent should get their heads broken on behalf of a Hainauter, however young, comely, and deserving of sympathy. They left him therefore, to the protection of a Heaven which had already placed about his golden head that startling mark of favour. Heaven, however, showed no sign of intervening to prolong the young man's earthly life, for with his monkish companion he reached the foot of the scaffold and mounted its wooden steps. The Ducal Lieutenant, looking on from his balcony, was relieved.

Under the shadow of the cross-beam, from which the noosed rope of yellow hemp was dangling ominously, the Sire Tristan stood to address the people, as was the right of every man in his extremity. His face was grey; the brave smile on his lips was stiff, frozen and lifeless. Neither his mind could conceive nor his lips articulate any valedictory words for the people upon whom a hush of piteous attention had now fallen. But before the perception of his plight had time to arise, the general silence was broken by a cry, followed by a rapidly swelling and spreading hubbub.

It began at a corner of the square to the left of the Stadhuis, which the doomed man was facing, and appeared to have its source about a lady on a richly-caparisoned white horse, for whom a number of grooms were labouring to open a way through the crowd, a way which opened of itself rapidly enough and almost joyously once her identity became known and her object—or at least some part of it—suspected.

She was the Lady Margaret of Saint-Gilles, the daughter of an opulent Flemish nobleman of Waes, sharing the esteem and affection in which her father was held throughout Flanders, adding to it even by her own natural endowments. She was unknown to the Sire de Vauvenargues, who was a Burgundian, lately brought from Dijon by the Duke, and as yet unacquainted either with the persons or the customs of those to whom he dispensed justice in the Duke's name. But there was in her commanding beauty a passport to the favour of any man who was not withered to the marrow. And the Sire de Vauvenargues, for all his cold austerity of manner

and lean gravity of countenance, was still on the young side of forty and far from destitute of gallantry. Disturbed though he might be again by these growing murmurs, yet the greater part of his attention at the moment was for this splendid figure in a trailing riding-dress of mulberry velvet, mounted on that richly caparisoned horse, for which the grooms were opening a way in his direction. She carried her head proudly, he observed, and as she neared the low balcony he occupied, he was almost dazzled by the effulgence of the dark blue eyes glowing in a face as pale as ivory. Her head was crowned by the tall steeple-shaped hennin, from which floated a misty veil of blue, and a jewel of price gleamed in the black frontlet across her brow, as if to proclaim her rank.

When first the eyes of the Sire Tristan had beheld her, a tremor had run through his limbs, a tinge of colour had crept into his pallid cheeks and life had returned to his lack-lustre gaze. It was as if the very sight of her had power to conquer his fear of death; as if all his consciousness were suddenly focussed in his eyes, and seeing her, he saw nothing else, knew of nothing else.

The Captain of the Archers, standing behind him on the scaffold, had touched his shoulder and bidden him say his say, so that they might conclude the business and go home to dine. The hangman and his valet had been growing impatient too. But now the attention of captain, of hangman and even of priest, like that of the multitude, was transformed from the doomed man to the lady on the white palfrey. The Sire Tristan had suddenly ceased to be the chief actor in this grim scene.

She had drawn rein immediately under that low balcony occupied by the Ducal Lieutenant in his furred gown and chain of office, attended by the Burgomaster van Genck and a group of officers. She lifted up her voice, a voice rich, sonorous and musical to match her splendid personality.

"A boon, my lord lieutenant! I ask as a boon what by our ancient Flemish customs I might claim as a right: that I may be married to this man whom the Duke's justice is about to hang."

It occurred then to Tristan de Beloeil, who had missed no word of it, that all this was not real; that it was not happening at all; that he was still in his prison asleep, and, so, dreaming of this incredible thing. The Sire de

Vauvenargues, ignorant of those Flemish customs to which she appealed, may have had some similar thought. He flushed and scowled. Somehow this request seemed to make a mock of him, of his authority and of the justice of the Duke, his master, which should be executed with due solemnity of forms. He looked to right and to left, at the fat Burgomaster, grinning like an idol, at the frowning Burgundian captains and at the laughing applauding people below. He turned to the lady with a curt contemptuous dismissal. But her beauty withered it on his lips. He contented himself with a cold announcement that what she asked was impossible.

Her answer by taking him too literally seemed further to exploit the mockery.

"Not so, my lord. There is a priest on the scaffold there to make it possible at once." Pale she might be; but she was singularly firm. There was no tremor in her rich young voice, no faltering in the steady gaze of her deep blue eyes.

The Ducal Lieutenant's voice came harsher now and more impatient. "The request is unexampled, an effrontery! You delay the Duke's justice, frivolously, madam. It is outrageous!" Impulsively he raised his hand to signal to the Captain of the Archers, but found his arm caught in the grasp of the Burgomaster. Mynheer van Genck no longer grinned. His face was very grave, his eyes almost scared.

The laughter and applause below had suddenly changed to angry murmurs, which grew as they rippled through the ranks of the multitude. Clear above the inarticulate mutter of indignation came the shouted words:

"It is an honoured Flemish custom, Lord Lieutenant!"

"The Duke of Burgundy would not trample on our rights and privileges!"

"You are false to your trust, Lord Lieutenant, if you deny this lady!"

Despotic, cold and arrogant, the Sire de Vauvenargues might be; but he was not a fool; indeed, he was a man of some acuteness, else he would not have been raised by Charles of Burgundy to the eminence he occupied. He had the intelligence to know when he was confronted by something which he did not understand. He raised his hand for silence and patience, and was almost surprised by the readiness with which they were accorded him.

He turned for guidance to the Burgomaster.

"What is this, sir, of a custom, a right, a privilege?"

"It is as they tell you, my lord. It is an old Flemish custom which gives any woman the right to marry a doomed man on the scaffold, provided that he is marriageable."

The Lieutenant's lip curled. "A gruesome custom that, faith! And a stupid one. What satisfaction lies in it?"

The Burgomaster shrugged and spread his podgy hands. "Can your excellency conceive of no case in which it would yield satisfaction?"

"With difficulty, my friend. But——" He shrugged in his turn, contemptuously. "I'll not provoke a riot by refusing them so barren a favour." He leaned from the balcony. His harsh, penetrating voice rang clear. "I bow to your Flemish privileges, Madame. Your request is granted in the Duke's name. I beg that you will make haste, so that we may conclude the business upon which we are here." He seemed to sneer as he spoke. But she took no heed of that. She thanked him shortly, and wheeled her horse about.

The crowd fell back readily enough, and amid acclamations and laughter she came to alight at the foot of the scaffold, and to mount its steps to where the Sire Tristan waited. He looked and felt as if he would swoon. He had been no paler when he stood beneath the rope to utter his last words. And now not even that stiff frozen smile which pride had dictated was to be seen upon his lips.

Gently, tenderly smiling, the Lady of Saint-Gilles confronted him. "Do you take me to wife, Sire Tristan?" she softly asked him, and thus seemed to increase his disorder.

His scared eyes sought her glance and fled from it; he made an almost convulsive movement of his arms. "Madame! Madame! Bethink you of yourself. I am not worthy that you should do this——"

"It is for me to be the judge of that. It is my wish. Will you deny me? Will you shame me by refusing me here before all these? That were to make me a by-word for all the days of my life."

He lowered his head, his face flaming scarlet. Subduing his voice, so that only she might hear him, he made his almost agonized protest. "You should not——" he was beginning, when she interrupted him, sensing what he was about to say.

"Perhaps I should not." Her voice was almost wistful

now. "But it is done. I am committed to it." A great sadness seemed to invest her. "Dismiss me if you will——"

He fell on his knees before her there in the sight of all, and it was a spectacle that thrilled the audience with delight. "Lady, it is my worthlessness is the only barrier."

With one hand she raised him, with the other she beckoned forward the priest.

Messire Tristan protested no more. He could not make a mock of her by refusing this precious gift of herself which he knew she must offer out of pity for him. Swiftly the vows were exchanged, the words of the nuptial blessing uttered, binding them irrevocably; and already, to the wild acclamations of the crowd, she was leading him by the hand towards the steps of the scaffold, when the Burgundian captain intervened.

"Gently, gently, lady!" His gauntleted hand closed upon the Sire Tristan's arm. "You'll leave your husband with us, if you please."

The crowd perceived his action, those nearest even overheard his words, and he was answered instantly by a howl of fury from a thousand throats. Fists were shaken at him, weapons brandished, and at once the multitude surged forward like a tide to overwhelm the scaffold. Below, his well-trained archers, shoulder to shoulder, made a bulwark against which that first charge spent itself in vain. But other charges would follow which must overwhelm them. He did not understand, being like the Sire de Vauvenargues, a newcomer in these outlying Burgundian dominions. He raised his hand, and at the same time turned towards the Stadhuis balcony for instructions.

The crowd perceiving this, trusting that orders would follow to correct this rash officer, paused and fell silent. At the head of the steps the Lady Margaret and her bridegroom stood arrested, waiting.

On the balcony the Sire de Vauvenargues was expressing his indignation to the Burgomaster.

"What is this? I accord the boon, I bow to your absurd Flemish custom and this is how your people requite me. If insubordination to the Duke's——"

The Burgomaster interrupted him. There was almost a sly humour about the sleek little man.

"My Lord, I fear you have not quite understood. This

old Flemish custom to the exercise of which you wisely consented, runs that a marriage-knot tied at the gallows rescues a doomed neck from the halter."

"*Ventredieu!*" swore the Ducal Lieutenant in his amazement. Then his anger mounted again! "Why did you not tell me this?"

"I did not think there was the need. The inference seemed plain. What point else would there be in such a marriage?"

"Did you not hear me complain that I found it pointless? You have fooled me, sir. At least, you have tried to fool me. But I am not a man easily fooled, and Burgundian justice is not so easily to be cozened. That rascal hangs as surely as——"

"In God's name!" The Burgomaster was trembling with dread and horror. "You might have escaped a riot by firmness before. You cannot now. You might have refused to admit the custom. Having admitted it, you cannot trample upon it. You must perceive that, my lord."

"I perceive that you mock me! I perceive that, by God!" He did, and for all the rage that set him white and quivering, he perceived something more. He perceived that he was on the horns of a dilemma. If he provoked a riot as he must if he insisted now upon justice being done, he would even have to face the anger of the Duke. If, submitting to this clamour, he suffered Burgundian justice to be set aside, he would similarly incur his master's anger. Whatever happened now, the Duke would demand an account of him.

That was the situation into which this sly Burgomaster—the friend, of course, of all Flemish rogues—had manœuvred him. And then he saw light. It was not a bright or encouraging light. But it was the best that the circumstances left him. He would postpone execution whilst referring the whole matter to the Duke. Thus he would avoid, or appear in ducal eyes to avoid, some measure of this hideous responsibility now thrust upon him.

He swallowed his pride and arrogance to make the announcement in conciliatory terms.

He confessed that he had not been aware of the full import of the custom when he gave his consent to the marriage. But that having given it, he could not do violence to Flemish privileges by insisting now upon the execution of the just sentence passed yesterday in his court upon the Sire Tristan de

Beloeil. Applause broke out at this, and he was forced to pause until it had subsided before adding that being no more than a servant and mouthpiece of his highness the Duke of Burgundy, whose loyal faithful subjects they all were, it was not in his power to do violence to Burgundian justice by allowing the prisoner to go free. He was interrupted again, this time by a storm of angry protests and even threats. In resuming presently he made an even further immolation of his pride. He cast himself as it were upon the mercy of the people. He represented himself as a man in an extremely difficult situation, a situation indeed of such difficulty that it was beyond the power of his office to resolve it; wherefore he had no choice but to refer the whole matter to the Duke himself. He added, however, and quickly before they could again interrupt him, the assurance that in laying the matter before his highness, he would himself plead the cause of the prisoner if it became necessary and urge observance of the Flemish custom to which appeal had been made. He could not think that the Duke would desire to violate it, but he dare not take the responsibility of acting upon that assumption. He closed his little oration in conciliatory words (which almost choked him) whereby again he cast himself upon their mercy.

But despite this unusual humility in a Ducal Lieutenant, he would not have won out of his difficulty so easily, if the little Burgomaster who had so deliberately tricked him into it, had not come now to his assistance by endorsing all that he had said, supporting his appeal, and even adding a word of warning as to the consequences of any rioting. This warning which from the Ducal Lieutenant in such an hour would have had the effect of infuriating the people, was heeded by them because coming from their own Burgomaster. There were offensive and rebellious mutterings, it is true. But no resistance was offered to the removal of the prisoner under guard, and presently the people dispersed, the more speedily perhaps because the hour of dinner was already overpast.

That same afternoon the Sire de Vauvenargues set out for Brussels with his prisoner and a strong escort of fifty Burgundian lances. He suffered the Lady Margaret to attach herself and her attendants to his train, since it was not really in his power to prevent it. But he bore the Lady Margaret no love for the difficulty in which she had placed him, and he refused her permission to communicate in any way with his prisoner,



however much that same prisoner might now be her husband.

This was distressing not only to her, but also to the Sire Tristan, who was still all bemused and bewildered by the event, and desired at least an opportunity of expressing his gratitude and other things to her before they strung him up, as he was quite convinced that they would presently be doing. Travelling swiftly they reached Brussels late that night, too late for audience. The Sire de Vauvenargues bestowed his prisoner in one of the dungeons of the Cour des Princes, where the Duke had his residence, quartered his men and went to seek a lodging for himself in the palace. The Lady Margaret made shift for herself and her attendants at the Lion of Brabant, whither the Sire de Vauvenargues grudgingly undertook to send her word in the morning of the ducal decision.

Betimes next day he presented himself for the bad quarter of an hour which he had every reason to expect. He was introduced to the Duke's closet and received with a scowl such as that with which he, himself, was in the habit of intimidating suppliants.

"By what authority, sir, do you leave your government?" the Duke demanded before the Sire de Vauvenargues had time to speak.

He bent himself almost double. "I trust the case when your highness shall have heard it will justify me."

"Is there a revolt among these mutinous Ghenters?" The Duke detested all Flemings, and of all Flemings he detested the Ghenters most, having had a taste of their insubordinate quality.

"There might have been had I not decided to seek the guidance of your highness."

"So, so!" The young prince heaved himself up. A man of middle height was this Charles of Burgundy, whom history knows as the Temerarious, powerfully built and swarthy of complexion which with the dark eyes and black hair advertised the Portuguese extraction of which he was so proud. His countenance might have been handsome but for the forward thrust of his powerful jaw. He was dressed with sober richness, his pleated pourpoint of purple velvet latticed with gold across his breast, and he wore for only ornament the collar of the Golden Fleece about his sturdy neck. Harsh, impetuous, choleric of nature, the very suggestion of

insubordination to his authority now put him in a passion, and he loosed it in threats of what he would do to make the Ghenters realise once for all that he was master. Thereafter he invited his Lieutenant to state the case.

The Sire de Vauvenargues told his tale none too well. The Duke's manner was not conducive to lucidity. It was some little time before his highness caught the drift of it. When at last he did, he laughed ferociously.

"So that the threatened revolt, then, was of your making, Sir Lieutenant?"

"Of my making, highness! I did not know——."

"Just so. You did not know and had not the wit to inform yourself, nor indeed, it seems, the wit to discharge any part of your duties. First you choose to make a public show of this hanging, appointing for it the hour when the looms are deserted and all these turbulent weavers in the streets; then you pledge me to a crazy custom which makes a mock of my justice. But my justice, I tell you, is not to be mocked. So you will get you back to Ghent with your prisoner and there execute the sentence you passed upon him in my name."

The Lieutenant was aghast. "If I hang him, the Ghenters will certainly hang me afterwards."

"God give them joy of it," said the Duke. "What else are you fit for?"

"Nothing else if your highness thinks so. But to hang me is, after all, in a sense to hang your highness, since I am your highness' representative."

The Duke sneered at him. "I could bear to be hanged by proxy. Indeed, it will be a satisfaction to be hanged by proxy if you are the proxy. And it will give me the right to read these Ghenters a sharp lesson in submission, which they appear to need. I will avenge you roundly. Be comforted by that."

But the Sire de Vauvenargues was not so easily comforted. Far from it, he was driven now to become in earnest the advocate of the Sire Tristan. "Highness, if I dare presume so far, since the error is committed, is it prudent, or—or—expedient to permit the life of one man to—to——"

The glare of the Ducal eye brought him faltering into silence.

"It is not the life of a man that is in question. Your blundering gives me to choose between a riot, perhaps a

revolt in Ghent and the flouting of my authority. There can be no hesitation for me. This man of yours must hang, whatever the consequences and in spite of all Flemish customs." Then, contemptuously he added: "Show me how to avoid it, and I will overlook your wooden-headed blundering which is responsible."

If the Sire de Vauvenargues felt, as many another has felt, that the services of princes is the service of the ungrateful, he choked the feeling down to apply his wits to discovering the way of escape for himself.

"If highness," he suggested, "in your revision of the case, you were to discover that my sentence had been unduly severe, there would no longer be any question of pardoning the offender or bowing to any custom. Your highness would simply cancel my sentence and reprimand me."

The Duke raised his black brows; his eyes gleamed momentarily from some inward quickening. Then he was frowning again.

"What was the man's offence?" he asked.

The Sire de Vauvenargues informed him exactly. There was a pause in which the Duke's dark eyes pondered his Lieutenant inscrutably. Suddenly they blazed, and his harsh voice was raised.

"By St. George!" he swore. "And do you sentence men of birth to death in Ghent upon no better grounds?" He raged on from that, heaping invective upon the head of the unfortunate Lieutenant, who could not be sure whether his highness were acting or not, whether he were snatching at a pretext to avoid the real issue, or whether he was sincere. In his doubt he found it necessary to defend himself.

"The orders of your highness for such cases left me no doubt or choice——"

"Will you argue with me, wooden-head?" The Duke's fury lashed him. "Get you back to Ghent, and remember what I have said. I will deal myself with this prisoner of yours."

The Sire de Vauvenargues went out backwards, glad to make his escape, certain that the Duke's anger was so much make-believe, and more persuaded than ever that the service of princes was as thankless as it was perilous.

The Sir Tristan de Beloeil brought before the Duke was clearly informed that his highness having sifted the matter of his

offence had reached the conclusion that the Ducal Lieutenant in Ghent had used him with excessive rigour in sentencing him to death. It was because of this, and because of this only, and not out of deference to any plaguey Flemish customs—and the Sire Tristan was desired to publish the matter widely upon his return to Ghent, lest a misunderstanding of the facts might lead others into error—that he was permitted to go free and rejoin the lady who had taken him to husband.

That lady the Sire Tristan found at the Lion of Brabant when presently he came there, conducted by one of her attendants who had lain in wait for him in the courtyard of the Cour des Princes. Of all the trials and anxieties that had been his since he was sentenced, this was by no means the least. He entered her presence in trepidation. She rose in a trepidation still deeper to receive him.

For a long moment they just stared at each other across the width of the room in which they found themselves alone together.

"Madame," he said, between plaintiveness and reproach, "why have you done this?"

"Surely, surely, sir, the reason is plain. It is in the consequences. To save your life. I know I forced it upon you. You could not humiliate me by preferring the hangman's knot to mine. You were too gallant for that. But I hoped that the sweetness of life itself would make amends. That you would choose to avoid the bitterness of death at any price."

"At any price!" he echoed, with a little twisted smile on his pale lips. "Yes. At any price to myself. But not at any price to you, madame."

He saw her eyes quicken at that, saw the flush that crept into her pallid cheeks. "But if I was glad to pay the price?"

At that he fell to trembling. "It is not possible, madame."

"Is it not?" She laughed a little, but sadly. "Does it need that I tell you what it is was that urged me to save your life; or are you under the impression that it is a habit of mine to rescue men from hanging by marrying them?" She paused. "Although I am your reluctantly espoused wife, I beg that you will spare me a deeper avowal."

He just stared bewildered, at this lovely lady whom he had silently worshipped in the past, between whom and himself

hitherto no single word of love had ever been uttered. She hung her head, her trouble deepened by his silence.

"I cannot have done you a great wrong," she murmured!  
"At least you have your life. Surely it is better to live even in a wedlock that is not of your own choosing than not to live at all. I beg—I implore that you will do me the charity to say at least so much."

What he said was something very different. "You knew," he asked her, "why I was to have been hanged?"

She looked at him, a puzzled frown between her fine brows. "Because you wounded Messire Van der Schuylen in an irregular duel which had no proper witnesses."

"Ah yes. But why I fought him?"

"How could I know that, since you refused to disclose it even at your trial? It was your silence that provoked your sentence."

He smiled now, and advanced a little. "You do not ask. Have you no curiosity? It was because he spoke lightly of you, madame."

It was her turn to tremble. He saw the colour fade again from her cheeks, the widening stare of her eyes and the tumult at her breast. "Of me!" She pressed a hand to her heart. "It was for that—for me that you fought? Why?"

"Margaret, must you be asking? Do you not know the answer? For the same reason that you rescued me from hanging."

After that they continued gazing raptly at each other for a spell. Then they fell to laughing, joyously as children laugh.

If there had been between them no wooing such as usually precedes wedlock, they perceived that they might make blissful amends for it now that they were man and wife.

FRANCIS BRET HARTE

*Miss*

*The Idyll of Red Gulch*

Bret Harte had an adventurous career, wandering over the United States as schoolmaster, printer and miner, and it was by his brilliant sketches of mining life in California that he built up his literary reputation. The Heathen Chinee and other verses won him a high place as a humorous poet.



## MISS

### I

JUST where the Sierra Nevada begins to subside in gentler undulations, and the rivers grow less rapid and yellow, on the side of a great red mountain, stands "Smith's Pocket." Seen from the red road at sunset, in the red light and the red dust, its white houses look like the outcropping of quartz on the mountain-side. The red stage, topped with red-shirted passengers, is lost to view half a dozen times in the tortuous descent, turning up unexpectedly in out-of-the-way places, and vanishing altogether within a hundred yards of the town. It is probably owing to this sudden twist in the road that the advent of a stranger at Smith's Pocket is usually attended with a peculiar circumstance. Dismounting from the vehicle at the stage-office, the too confident traveller is apt to walk straight out of town under the impression that it lies in quite another direction. It is related that one of the tunnel-men, two miles from town, met one of these self-reliant passengers with a carpet-bag, umbrella, "Harper's Magazine," and other evidences of "Civilisation and Refinement," plodding along over the road he had just ridden, vainly endeavouring to find the settlement of Smith's Pocket.

An observant traveller might have found some compensation for his disappointment in the weird aspect of that vicinity. There were huge fissures on the hill-side, and displacements of the red soil, resembling more the chaos of some primary elemental upheaval than the work of man; while, half-way down, a long flume straddled its narrow body and disproportionate legs over the chasm, like an enormous fossil of some forgotten antediluvian. At every step smaller ditches crossed the road, hiding in their sallow depths unlovely streams that crept away to a clandestine union with the great yellow torrent below, and here and there were the ruins of some cabin, with the chimney alone left intact and the hearthstone open to the skies.



The settlement of Smith's Pocket owed its origin to the finding of a "pocket" on its site by a veritable Smith. Five thousand dollars were taken out of it in one half-hour by Smith. Three thousand dollars were expended by Smith and others in erecting a flume and in tunnelling. And then Smith's Pocket was found to be only a pocket, and subject, like other pockets, to depletion. Although Smith pierced the bowels of the great red mountain, that five thousand dollars was the first and last return of his labour. The mountain grew reticent of its golder secrets, and the flume steadily ebbed away the remainder of Smith's fortune. Then Smith went into quartz-mining; then into quartz-milling; then into hydraulics and ditching; and then by easy degrees into saloon-keeping. Presently it was whispered that Smith was drinking a great deal; then it was known that Smith was a habitual drunkard, and then people began to think, as they are apt to, that he had never been anything else. But the settlement of Smith's Pocket, like that of most discoveries, was happily not dependent on the fortune of its pioneer, and other parties projected tunnels and found pockets. So Smith's Pocket became a settlement, with its two fancy stores, its two hotels, its one express-office, and its two first families. Occasionally its one long straggling street was overawed by the assumption of the latest San Francisco fashions, imported per express, exclusively to the first families; making outraged Nature, in the ragged outline of her furrowed surface, look still more homely, and putting personal insult on that greater portion of the population to whom the Sabbath, with a change of linen, brought merely the necessity of cleanliness, without the luxury of adornment. Then there was a Methodist Church, and hard by a Monte Bank, and a little beyond, on the mountain-side, a graveyard; and then a little school-house.

"The Master," as he was known to his little flock, sat alone one night in the school-house, with some open copy-books before him, carefully making those bold and full characters which are supposed to combine the extremes of chirographical and moral excellence, and had got as far as "Riches are deceitful," and was elaborating the noun with an insincerity of flourish that was quite in the spirit of his text, when he heard a gentle tapping. The woodpeckers had been busy about the roof during the day, and the noise did not disturb his work. But the opening of the door, and the tapping continuing from

the inside, caused him to look up. He was slightly startled by the figure of a young girl, dirty and shabbily clad. Still, her great black eyes, her coarse, uncombed, lustreless black hair falling over her sun-burned face, her red arms and feet streaked with the red soil, were all familiar to him. It was Melissa Smith—Smith's motherless child.

"What can she want here?" thought the master. Everybody knew "Mliss," as she was called, throughout the length and height of Red Mountain. Everybody knew her as an incorrigible girl. Her fierce, ungovernable disposition, her mad freaks and lawless character, were in their way as proverbial as the story of her father's weaknesses, and as philosophically accepted by the townsfolk. She wrangled with and fought the schoolboys with keener invective and quite as powerful arm. She followed the trails with a woodman's craft, and the master had met her before, miles away, shoeless, stockingless, and bareheaded on the mountain road. The miners' camps along the stream supplied her with subsistence during these voluntary pilgrimages, in freely offered alms. Not but that a larger protection had been previously extended to Mliss. The Rev. Joshua McSnagley, "stated" preacher, had placed her in the hotel as servant, by way of preliminary refinement, and had introduced her to his scholars at Sunday School. But she threw plates occasionally at the landlord, and quickly retorted to the cheap witticisms of the guests, and created in the Sabbath school a sensation that was so inimical to the orthodox dulness and placidity of that institution, that with a decent regard for the starched frocks and unblemished morals of the two pink-and-white-faced children of the first families, the reverend gentleman had her ignominiously expelled. Such were the antecedents and such the character of Mliss, as she stood before the master. It was shown in the ragged dress, the unkempt hair, and bleeding feet, and asked his pity. It flashed from her black, fearless eyes, and commanded his respect.

"I come here to-night," she said rapidly and boldly, keeping her hard glance on his, "because I knew you was alone. I wouldn't come here when them gals was here. I hate 'em, and they hates me. That's why. You keep school, don't you? I want to be taught!"

If to the shabbiness of her apparel and uncomeliness of her tangled hair and dirty face she had added the humility of

tears, the master would have extended to her the usual moiety of pity, and nothing more. But with the natural, though illogical instincts of his species, her boldness awakened in him something of that respect which all original natures pay unconsciously to one another in any grade. And he gazed at her the more fixedly as she went on still rapidly, her hand on that door-latch and her eyes on his :—

“ My name’s Mliss—Mliss Smith ! You can bet your life on that. My father’s Old Smith—Old Bummer Smith—that’s what’s the matter with him. Mliss Smith—and I’m coming to school ! ”

“ Well ? ” said the Master.

Accustomed to be thwarted and opposed, often wantonly and cruelly, for no other purpose than to excite the violent impulses of her nature, the master’s phlegm evidently took her by surprise. She stopped ; she began to twist a lock of her hair between her fingers ; and the rigid line of upper lip, drawn over the wicked little teeth, relaxed and quivered slightly. Then her eyes dropped, and something like a blush struggled up to her cheek, and tried to assert itself through the splashes of redder soil and the sunburn of years. Suddenly she threw herself forward, calling on God to strike her dead, and fell, quite weak and helpless, with her face on the master’s desk, crying and sobbing as if her heart would break.

The master lifted her gently, and waited for the paroxysm to pass. When, with face still averted, she was repeating between her sobs the *mea culpa* of childish penitence—that “ she’d be good, she didn’t mean to,” etc., it came to him to ask her why she had left Sabbath school.

Why had she left the Sabbath school ?—why ? O yes. What did he (McSnagley) want to tell her she was wicked for ? What did he tell her that God hated her for ? If God hated her, what did she want to go to Sabbath school for ? *She* didn’t want to be “ beholden ” to anybody who hated her.

Had she told McSnagley this ?

Yes, she had.

The master laughed. It was a hearty laugh, and echoed so oddly in the little school-house, and seemed so inconsistent and discordant with the sighing of the pines without, that he shortly corrected himself with a sigh. The sigh was quite as sincere in its way, however, and after a moment of serious silence he asked about her father.

Her father? What father? Whose father? What had he ever done for her? Why did the girls hate her? Come now! what made the foks say, "Old Bummer Smith's Mliss!" when she passed? Yes; O yes. She wished he was dead—she was dead—everybody was dead; and her sobs broke forth anew.

The master then, leaning over her, told her as well as he could what you or I might have said after hearing such unnatural theories from childish lips; only bearing in mind, perhaps better than you or I, the unnatural facts of her ragged dress, her bleeding feet, and the omnipresent shadow of her drunken father. Then, raising her to her feet, he wrapped her shawl around her, and, bidding her come early in the morning, he walked with her down the road. There he bade her "good-night." The moon shone brightly on the narrow path before them. He stood and watched the bent little figure as it staggered down the road, and waited until it had passed the little graveyard and reached the curve of the hill, where it turned and stood for a moment, a mere atom of suffering outlined against the far-off patient stars. Then he went back to his work. But the lines of the copy-book thereafter faded into long parallels of never-ending road, over which childish figures seemed to pass sobbing and crying into the night. Then, the little school-house seeming lonelier than before, he shut the door and went home.

The next morning Mliss came to school. Her face had been washed, and her coarse black hair bore evidence of recent struggles with the comb, in which both had evidently suffered. The old defiant look shone occasionally in her eyes, but her manner was tamer and more subdued. Then began a series of little trials and self-sacrifices, in which master and pupil bore an equal part, and which increased the confidence and sympathy between them. Although obedient under the master's eye, at time during recess, if thwarted or stung by a fancied slight, Mliss would rage in ungovernable fury, and many a palpitating young savage, finding himself matched with his own weapons of torment, would seek the master with torn jacket and scratched face, and complaints of the dreadful Mliss. There was a serious division among the townspeople on the subject, some threatening to withdraw their children from such evil companionship, and others as warmly upholding the course of the master in his work of reclamation.

Meanwhile, with a steady persistence that seemed quite astonishing to him, on looking back afterward, the master drew Mliss gradually out of the shadow of her past life, as though it were but her natural progress down the narrow path on which he had set her feet the moonlit night of their first meeting. Remembering the experience of the evangelical McSnagley, he carefully avoided that Rock of Ages on which that unskilful pilot had shipwrecked her young faith. But if, in the course of her reading, she chanced to stumble upon those few words which have lifted such as she above the level of the older, the wiser, and the more prudent—if she learned something of a faith that is symbolised by suffering, and the old light softened in her eyes, it did not take the shape of a lesson. A few of the plainer people had made up a little sum by which the ragged Mliss was enabled to assume the garments of respect and civilisation; and often a rough shake of the hand, and words of homely commendation from a red-shirted and burly figure, sent a glow to the cheek of the young master, and set him to thinking if it was altogether deserved.

Three months had passed from the time of their first meeting, and the master was sitting late one evening over the moral and sententious copies, when there came a tap at the door, and again Mliss stood before him. She was neatly clad and clean-faced, and there was nothing, perhaps, but the long black hair and bright black eyes to remind him of his former apparition. "Are you busy?" she asked. "Can you come with me?"—and on his signifying his readiness, in her old wilful way she said, "Come, then, quick!"

They passed out of the door together, and into the dark road. As they entered the town, the master asked her whither she was going. She replied, "To see my father."

It was the first time he had heard her call him by that filial title, or, indeed, anything more than "Old Smith" or the "Old Man." It was the first time in three months that she had spoken of him at all, and the master knew she had kept resolutely aloof from him since her great change. Satisfied, from her manner, that it was fruitless to question her purpose, he passively followed. In out-of-the-way places, low grogeries, restaurants, and saloons, in gambling-hells and dance-houses, the master, preceded by Mliss, came and went. In the reeking smoke and blasphemous outcries of low dens, the child, holding the master's hand, stood and anxiously

gazed, seemingly unconscious of all, in the one absorbing nature of her pursuit. Some of the revellers, recognising Mliss, called to the child to sing and dance for them, and would have forced liquor upon her but for the interference of the master. Others, recognising him mutely, made way for them to pass. So an hour slipped by. Then the child whispered in his ear that there was a cabin on the other side of the creek crossed by the long flume, where she thought he still might be. Thither they crossed—a toilsome half-hour's walk—but in vain. They were returning by the ditch at the abutment of the flume, gazing at the lights of the town on the opposite bank, when suddenly, sharply, a quick report rang out on the clear night air. The echoes caught it, and carried it round and round Red Mountains, and set the dogs to barking all along the streams. Lights seemed to dance and move quickly on the outskirts of the town for a few moments, the stream rippled quite audibly beside them, a few stones loosened themselves from the hill-side and splashed into the stream, a heavy wind seemed to surge the branches of the funereal pines, and then the silence seemed to fall thicker, heavier, and deadlier. The master turned towards Mliss with an unconscious gesture of protection, but the child had gone. Oppressed by a strange fear, he ran quickly down the trail to the river's bed, and, jumping from boulder to boulder, reached the base of Red Mountain and the outskirts of the village. Midway of the crossing, he looked up and held his breath in awe. For high above him on the narrow flume, he saw the fluttering little figure of his late companion, crossing swiftly in the darkness.

He climbed the bank, and, guided by a few lights, moving about a central point on the mountain, soon found himself breathless among a crowd of awe-stricken and sorrowful men. Out from among them the child appeared, and, taking the master's hand, led him silently before what seemed a ragged hole in the mountain. Her face was quite white, but her excited manner gone, and her look that of one to whom some long-expected event had at last happened—an expression that, to the master in his bewilderment, seemed almost like relief. The walls of the cavern were partly propped by decaying timbers. The child pointed to what appeared to be some ragged, cast-off clothes, left in the hole by the late occupant. The master approached nearer with his flaming dip, and

bent over them. It was Smith, already cold, with a pistol in his hand and a bullet in his heart, lying beside his empty "pocket."

## CHAPTER II

THE opinion which McSnagley expressed in reference to a "change of heart" supposed to be experienced by Mliss was more forcibly described in the gulches and tunnels. It was thought there that Mliss had "struck a good lead." So when there was a new grave added to the little enclosure, and, at the expense of the master, a little board and inscription put above it, the Red Mountain Banner came out quite handsomely, and did the fair thing to the memory of one of "our oldest Pioneers," alluding gracefully to that "bane of noble intellects," and otherwise genteelly shelving our dear brother with the past. "He leaves an only child to mourn his loss," says the Banner, "who is now an exemplary scholar, thanks to the efforts of the Rev. Mr. McSnagley." The Rev. McSnagley, in fact, made a strong point of Mliss's conversion, and indirectly attributing to the unfortunate child the suicide of her father, made affecting allusion in Sunday school to the beneficial effects of the "silent tomb," and in this cheerful contemplation drove most of the children into speechless horror, and caused the pink-and-white scions of the first families to howl dismally, and refuse to be comforted.

The long dry summer came. As each fierce day burned itself out in little whiffs of pearl grey smoke on the mountain summits, and the up-springing breeze scattered its red embers over the landscape, the green wave which in early spring upheaved above Smith's grave grew sere, and dry, and hard. In those days the master strolling in the little churchyard of a Sabbath afternoon, was sometimes surprised to find a few wild flowers plucked from the damp pine-forests scattered there, and oftener rude wreaths hung upon the little pine cross. Most of these wreaths were formed of a sweet-scented grass, which the children loved to keep in their desks, intertwined with the plumes of the buckeye, the syringa, and the wood-anemone; and here and there the master noticed the dark blue cowl of the monk's-hood or deadly aconite. There was something in the odd association of this noxious plant with these memorials which occasioned a painful sensation to the master, deeper than

his æsthetic sense. One day, during a long walk, in crossing a wooded ridge he came upon Mliss in the heart of the forest, perched upon a prostrate pine, on a fantastic throne formed by the hanging plumes of lifeless branches, her lap full of grasses and pine-burrs, and crooning to herself one of the negro melodies of her younger life. Recognising him at a distance, she made room for him on her elevated throne, and with a grave assumption of hospitality and patronage that would have been ridiculous had it not been so terribly earnest, she fed him with pine-nuts and crab-apples. The master took that opportunity to point out to her the noxious and deadly quality of the monk's-hood, whose dark blossoms he saw in her lap, and extorted from her a promise not to meddle with it as long as she remained his pupil. This done—as the master had tested her integrity before—he rested satisfied, and the strange feeling which had overcome him on seeing them died away.

Of the homes that were offered Mliss when her conversion became known, the master preferred that of Mrs. Morpher, a womanly and kind-hearted specimen of South-western efflorescence, known in her maidenhood as the "Per-rairie Rose." Being one of those who contend resolutely against their own natures, Mrs. Morpher, by a long series of self-sacrifices and struggles, had at last subjugated her naturally careless disposition to principles of "order," which she considered, in common with Mr. Pope, as "Heaven's first law." But she could not entirely govern the orbits of her satellites, however regular her own movements, and even her own "Jeemes" sometimes collided with her. Again her old nature asserted itself in her children. Lycurgus dipped into the cupboard "between meals," and Aristides came home from school without shoes, leaving those important articles on the threshold for the delight of a barefooted walk down the ditches. Octavia and Cassandra were "keerless" of their clothes. So with but one exception, however much the "Prairie Rose" might have trimmed and pruned and trained her own matured luxuriance, the little shoots came up defiantly wild and straggling. That one exception was Clytemnestra Morpher, aged fifteen. She was the realisation of her mother's immaculate conception—neat, orderly, and dull.

It was an amiable weakness of Mr. Morpher to imagine that "Clytie" was a consolation and model for Mliss. Follow-



ing this fallacy, Mrs. Morpher threw Clytie at the head of Mliss when she was "bad," and set her up before the child for adoration in her penitential moments. It was not, therefore, surprising to the master to hear that Clytie was coming to school, obviously as a favour to the master, and as an example for Mliss and others. For "Clytie" was quite a young lady. Inheriting her mother's physical peculiarities, and in obedience to the climatic laws of the Red Mountain region, she was an early bloomer. The youth of Smith's Pocket, to whom this kind of flower was rare, sighed for her in April and languished in May. Enamoured swains haunted the school-house at the hour of dismissal. A few were jealous of the master.

Perhaps it was this latter circumstance that opened the master's eyes to another. He could not help noticing that Clytie was romantic; that in school she required a great deal of attention; that her pens were uniformly bad and wanted fixing; that she usually accompanied the request with a certain expectation in her eye that was somewhat disproportionate to the quality of service she verbally required; that she sometimes allowed the curves of a round, plump white arm to rest on his when he was writing her copies; that she always blushed and flung back her blonde curls when she did so. I don't remember whether I have stated that the master was a young man—it's of little consequence, however; he had been severely educated in the school in which Clytie was taking her first lesson, and, on the whole, withstood the flexible curves and factitious glance like the fine young Spartan that he was. Perhaps an insufficient quantity of food may have tended to this asceticism. He generally avoided Clytie; but one evening, when she returned to the school-house after something she had forgotten, and did not find it until the master walked home with her, I hear that he endeavoured to make himself particularly agreeable—partly from the fact, I imagine, that his conduct was adding gall and bitterness to the already overcharged hearts of Clytemnestra's admirers.

The morning after this affecting episode Mliss did not come to school. Noon came, but not Mliss. Questioning Clytie on the subject, it appeared that they had left the school together, but the wilful Mliss had taken another road. The afternoon brought her not. In the evening he called on Mrs. Morpher, whose motherly heart was really alarmed. Mr. Morpher had

spent all day in search of her, without discovering a trace that might lead to her discovery. Aristides was summoned as a probable accomplice, but that equitable infant succeeded in impressing the household with his innocence. Mrs. Morpher entertained a vivid impression that the child would yet be found drowned in a ditch, or, what was almost as terrible, muddled and soiled beyond the redemption of soap and water. Sick at heart, the master returned to the school-house. As he lit his lamp and seated himself at his desk, he found a note lying before him addressed to himself, in Mliss's handwriting. It seemed to be written on a leaf torn from some old memorandum book, and, to prevent sacrilegious trifling, had been sealed with six broken wafers. Opening it almost tenderly, the master read as follows :—

RESPECTED SIR,—When you read this, I am run away. Never to come back. *Never*, NEVER, NEVER. You can give my beads to Mary Jennings, and my *Amerika's Pride* (a highly coloured lithograph from a tobacco-box) to Sally Flanders. But don't you give anything to Clytie Morpher. Don't you dare to. Do you know what my opinion is of her, it is this, she is perfectly disgustin. This is all and no more at present from

Yours respectfully,  
MELISSA SMITH.

The master sat pondering on this strange epistle till the moon lifted its bright face above the distant hills, and illuminated the trail that led to the school-house, beaten quite hard with the coming and going of little feet. Then, more satisfied in mind, he tore the missive into fragments, and scattered them along the road.

At sunrise the next morning he was picking his way through the palm-like fern and thick under-bush of the pine-forest, starting the hare from its form, and awakening a querulous protest from a few dissipated crows, who had evidently been making a night of it, and so came to the wooded ridge where he had once found Mliss. There he found the prostrate pine and tasselled branches, but the throne was vacant. As he drew nearer, what might have been some frightened animal started through the crackling limbs. It ran up the tossed arms of the fallen monarch, and sheltered itself in some friendly foliage. The master, reaching the old seat found the nest still warm; looking up in the intertwining branches, he met the black eyes of the errant Mliss. They gazed at each other without speaking. She was first to break the silence.

"What do you want?" she asked, curtly.

The master had decided on a course of action.

"I want some crab-apples," he said, humbly.

"Sha'n't have 'em! go away. Why don't you get 'em of Clytemnerestera?" (It seemed to be a relief to Mliss to express her contempt in additional syllables to that classical young woman's already long-drawn title.) "O, you wicked thing!"

"I am hungry, Lissy. I have eaten nothing since dinner yesterday. I am famished!" and the young man, in a state of remarkable exhaustion, leaned against a tree.

Melissa's heart was touched. In the bitter days of her gipsy life she had known the sensation he so artfully simulated. Overcome by his heart-broken tone, but not entirely divested of suspicion, she said—

"Dig under the tree near the roots, and you'll find lots; but mind you don't tell;" for Mliss had *her* hoards as well as the rats and squirrels.

But the master, of course, was unable to find them, the effects of hunger probably blinding his senses. Mliss grew uneasy. At length she peered at him through the leaves in an elfish way, and questioned:—

"If I come down and give you some, you'll promise you won't touch me?"

The master promised.

"Hope you'll die if you do!"

The master accepted instant dissolution as a forfeit. Mliss slid down the tree. For a few moments nothing transpired but the munching of the pine-nuts.

"Do you feel better?" she asked, with some solicitude. The master confessed to a recuperated feeling, and then, gravely thanking her, proceeded to retrace his steps. As he expected, he had not gone far before she called him. He turned. She was standing there quite white, with tears in her widely-opened orbs. The master felt that the right moment had come. Going up to her, he took both her hands, and, looking in her tearful eyes, said gravely, "Lissy, do you remember the first evening you came to see me?"

Lissy remembered.

"You asked me if you might come to school, for you wanted to learn something and be better, and I said——"

"Come," responded the child, promptly.

"What would *you* say if the master now came to you and said that he was lonely without his little scholar, and that he wanted her to come and teach him to be better?"

The child hung her head for a few moments in silence. The master waited patiently. Tempted by the quiet, a hare ran close to the couple, and, raising her bright eyes and velvet fore-paws, sat and gazed at them. A squirrel ran half-way down the furrowed bark of the fallen tree, and there stopped.

"We are waiting, Lissy," said the master, in a whisper, and the child smiled. Stirred by a passing breeze, the tree-tops rocked, and a long pencil of light stole through their interlaced boughs full on the doubting face and irresolute little figure. Suddenly she took the master's hand in her quick way. What she said was scarcely audible, but the master, putting the black hair back from her forehead, kissed her; and so, hand in hand, they passed out of the damp aisles and forest odours into the open sunlit road.

### CHAPTER III

SOMEWHAT less spiteful in her intercourse with other scholars, Mliss still retained an offensive attitude in regard to Clytemnestra. Perhaps the jealous element was not entirely lulled in her passionate little breast. Perhaps it was only that the round curves and plump outline offered more extended pinching surface. But while such ebullitions were under the master's control, her enmity occasionally took a new and irrepressible form.

The master, in his first estimate of the child's character, could not conceive that she had ever possessed a doll. But the master, like many other professed readers of character, was safer in *à posteriori* than *à priori* reasoning. Mliss had a doll, but then it was emphatically Mliss's doll—a smaller copy of herself. Its unhappy existence had been a secret discovered accidentally by Mrs. Morpher. It had been the old-time companion of Mliss's wanderings, and bore evident marks of suffering. Its original complexion was long since washed away by the weather and anointed by the slime of ditches. It looked very much as Mliss had in days past. Its one gown of faded stuff was dirty and ragged, as hers had been. Mliss

had never been known to apply to it any childish term of endearment. She never exhibited it in the presence of other children. It was put severely to bed in a hollow tree near the school-house, and only allowed exercise during Mliss's rambles. Fulfilling a stern duty to her doll, as she would to herself, it knew no luxuries.

Now Mrs. Morpher, obeying a commendable impulse, bought another doll and gave it to Mliss. The child received it gravely and curiously. The master, on looking at it one day, fancied he saw a slight resemblance in its round red cheeks and mild blue eyes to Clytemnestra. It became evident before long that Mliss had also noticed the same resemblance. Accordingly she hammered its waxen head on the rocks when she was alone, and sometimes dragged it with a string round its neck to and from school. At other times, setting it up on her desk, she made a pincushion of its patient and inoffensive body. Whether this was done in revenge of what she considered a second figurative obtrusion of Clytie's excellencies upon her, or whether she had an intuitive appreciation of the rites of certain other heathens, and, indulging in that "fetish" ceremony, imagined that the original of her wax model would pine away and finally die, is a metaphysical question I shall not now consider.

In spite of these moral vagaries, the master could not help noticing in her different tasks the working of a quick, restless, and vigorous perception. She knew neither the hesitancy nor the doubts of childhood. Her answers in class were always slightly dashed with audacity. Of course she was not infallible. But her courage and daring in passing beyond her own depth and that of the floundering little swimmers around her, in their minds outweighed all errors of judgment. Children are not better than grown people in this respect, I fancy; and whenever the little red hand flashed above her desk, there was a wondering silence, and even the master was sometimes oppressed with a doubt of his own experience and judgment.

Nevertheless, certain attributes which at first amused and entertained his fancy began to afflict him with grave doubts. He could not but see that Mliss was revengeful, irreverent, and wilful. That there was but one better quality which pertained to her semi-savage disposition—the faculty of physical fortitude and self-sacrifice; and another, though not always an

attribute of the noble savage—Truth. Mliss was both fearless and sincere ; perhaps in such a character the adjectives were synonymous.

The master had been doing some hard thinking on this subject, and had arrived at that conclusion quite common to all who think sincerely, that he was generally the slave of his own prejudices, when he determined to call on the Rev. McSnagley for advice. This decision was somewhat humiliating to his pride, as he and McSnagley were not friends. But he thought of Mliss and the evening of their first meeting ; and perhaps, with a pardonable superstition that it was not chance alone that had guided her wilful feet to the school-house, and perhaps with a complacent consciousness of the rare magnanimity of the act, he choked back his dislike and went to McSnagley.

The reverend gentleman was glad to see him. Moreover, he observed that the master was looking “peartish,” and hoped he had got over the “neuralgy” and “rheumatiz.” He himself had been troubled with a dumb “ager” since last conference. But he had learned to “rastle and pray.”

Pausing a moment to enable the master to write his certain method of curing the dumb “ager” upon the book and volume of his brain, Mr. McSnagley proceeded to inquire after Sister Morpher. “She is an adornment to Christewanity, and has a likely growin’ young family,” added Mr. McSnagley ; “and there’s that mannerly young gal—so well behaved—Miss Clytie.” In fact, Clytie’s perfections seemed to affect him to such an extent that he dwelt for several minutes upon them. The master was doubly embarrassed. In the first place, there was an enforced contrast with poor Mliss in all this praise of Clytie. Secondly, there was something unpleasantly confidential in his tone of speaking of Mrs. Morpher’s earliest born. So that the master, after a few futile efforts to say something natural, found it convenient to recall another engagement, and left without asking the information required, but in his after reflections somewhat unjustly giving the Rev. Mr. McSnagley the full benefit of having refused it.

Perhaps this rebuff placed the master and pupil once more in the close communion of old. The child seemed to notice the change in the master’s manner, which had of late been constrained, and in one of their long post-prandial walks she

stopped suddenly, and, mounting a stump, looked full in his face with big, searching eyes.

"You ain't mad?" said she, with an interrogative shake of the black braids.

"No."

"Nor bothered?"

"No."

"Nor hungry?" (Hunger was to Mliss a sickness that might attack a person at any moment.)

"No."

"Nor thinking of her?"

"Of whom, Lissy?"

"That white girl." (This was the latest epithet invented by Mliss, who was a very dark brunette, to express Clytemnestra.)

"No."

"Upon your word?" (A substitute for "Hope you'll die!") proposed by the master.)

"Yes."

"And sacred honour?"

"Yes."

Then Mliss gave him a fierce little kiss, and, hopping down, fluttered off. For two or three days after that she condescended to appear more like other children, and be, as she expressed it, "good."

Two years had passed since the master's advent at Smith's Pocket, and as his salary was not large, and the prospects of Smith's Pocket eventually becoming the capital of the State not entirely definite, he contemplated a change. He had informed the school trustees privately of his intentions, but educated young men of unblemished moral character being scarce at that time, he consented to continue his school term through the winter to early spring. None else knew of his intention except his one friend, a Dr. Duchesne, a young Creole physician, known to the people of Wingdam as "Duchesny." He never mentioned it to Mrs. Morpher, Clytie, or any of his scholars. His reticence was partly the result of a constitutional indisposition to fuss, partly a desire to be spared the questions and surmises of vulgar curiosity, and partly that he never really believed he was going to do anything before it was done.

He did not like to think of Mliss. It was a selfish instinct,

perhaps, which made him try to fancy his feeling for the child was foolish, romantic, and unpractical. He even tried to imagine that she would do better under the control of an older and sterner teacher. Then she was nearly eleven, and in a few years, by the rules of Red Mountain, would be a woman. He had done his duty. After Smith's death he addressed letters to Smith's relatives, and received one answer from a sister of Melissa's mother. Thanking the master, she stated her intention of leaving the Atlantic States for California with her husband in a few months. This was a slight superstructure for the airy castle which the master pictured for Mliss's home, but it was easy to fancy that some loving, sympathetic woman, with the claims of kindred, might better guide her wayward nature. Yet, when the master had read the letter, Mliss listened to it carelessly, received it submissively, and afterwards cut figures out of it with her scissors supposed to represent Clytemnestra, labelled "the white girl," to prevent mistakes, and impaled them upon the outer walls of the school-house.

When the summer was about spent, and the last harvest had been gathered in the valleys, the master bethought him of gathering in a few ripened shoots of the young idea, and of having his Harvest-Home, or Examination. So the savants and professionals of Smith's Pocket were gathered to witness that time-honoured custom of placing timid children in a constrained position, and bullying them as in a witness-box. As usual in such cases, the most audacious and self-possessed were the lucky recipients of the honours. The reader will imagine that in the present instance Mliss and Clytie were pre-eminent, and divided public attention: Mliss with her clearness of material perception and self-reliance, Clytie with her placid self-esteem and saint-like correctness of deportment. The other little ones were timid and blundering. Mliss's readiness and brilliancy, of course, captivated the greatest number and provoked the greatest applause. Mliss's antecedents had unconsciously awakened the strongest sympathies of a class whose athletic forms were ranged against the walls, or whose handsome bearded faces looked in at the windows. But Mliss's popularity was overthrown by an unexpected circumstance.

McSnagley had invited himself, and had been going through the pleasing entertainment of frightening the more timid



pupils by the vaguest and most ambiguous questions, delivered in an impressive funeral tone; and Mliss had soared into Astronomy, and was tracking the course of our spotted ball through space, and keeping time with the music of the spheres, and defining the tethered orbits of the planets, when McSnagley impressively arose.

"Meelissy! ye were speaking of the revolutions of this yere yearth, and the move-*ments* of the sun, and I think ye said it had been a-doing of it since the creashun, eh?"

Mliss nodded a scornful affirmative.

"Well, war that the truth?" said McSnagley, folding his arms.

"Yes," said Mliss, shutting up her little red lips tightly.

The handsome outlines at the windows peered farther in the school-room, and a saintly Raphael-face, with blonde beard and soft blue eyes, belonging to the biggest scamp in the diggins, turned towards the child and whispered, "Stick to it, Mliss!"

The reverend gentleman heaved a deep sigh, and cast a compassionate glance at the master, then at the children, and then rested his look on Clytie. That young woman softly elevated her round white arm. Its seductive curves were enhanced by a gorgeous and massive specimen bracelet, the gift of one of her humblest worshippers, worn in honour of the occasion. There was a momentary silence. Clytie's round cheeks were very pink and soft. Clytie's big eyes were very bright and blue. Clytie's low-necked white book-muslin rested softly on Clytie's white, plump shoulders. Clytie looked at the master, and the master nodded. Then Clytie spoke softly—

"Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and it obeyed him!" There was a low hum of applause in the school-room, a triumphant expression on McSnagley's face, a grave shadow on the master's, and a comical look of disappointment reflected from the windows. Mliss skimmed rapidly over her Astronomy, and then shut the book with a loud snap. A groan burst from McSnagley, an expression of astonishment from the school-room, a yell from the windows, as Mliss brought her red fist down on the desk, with the emphatic declaration:—

"It's a lie! I don't believe it!"

## CHAPTER IV

THE long wet season had drawn near its close. Signs of spring were visible in the swelling buds and rushing torrents. The pine-forests exhaled the fresher spicery. The azaleas were already budding, the ceanothus getting ready its lilac livery for spring. On the green upland which climbed Red Mountain at its southern aspect, the long spike of the monk's-hood shot up from its broad-leaved stool, and once more shook its dark blue bells. Again the billow above Smith's grave was soft and green, its crest just tossed with the foam of daisies and buttercups. The little graveyard had gathered a few new dwellers in the past year, and the mounds were placed two by two by the little paling, until they reached Smith's grave, and there there was but one. General superstition had shunned it, and the plot beside Smith was vacant.

There had been several placards posted about the town, intimating that, at a certain period, a celebrated dramatic company would perform, for a few days, a series of "side-splitting" and "screaming farces"; that, alternating pleasantly with this, there would be some melodrama, and a grand divertissement, which would include singing, dancing, etc. These announcements occasioned a great fluttering among the little folk, and were the theme of much excitement and great speculation among the master's scholars. The master had promised Mliss, to whom this sort of thing was sacred and rare, that she should go, and on that momentous evening the master and Mliss "assisted."

The performance was the prevalent style of heavy mediocrity; the melodrama was not bad enough to laugh at, nor good enough to excite. But the master, turning wearily to the child, was astonished, and felt something like self-accusation, in noticing the peculiar effect upon her excitable nature. The red blood flushed in her cheeks at each stroke of her panting little heart. Her small, passionate lips were slightly parted, to give vent to her hurried breath. Her widely opened lids threw up and arched her black eyebrows. She did not laugh at the dismal comicalities of the funny man, for Mliss seldom laughed. Nor was she discreetly affected to the delicate extremes of the corner of a white handkerchief, as was the tender-hearted "Clytie," who was talking with her

"feller," and ogling the master at the same moment. But when the performance was over, and the green curtain fell on the little stage, Mliss drew a long deep breath, and turned to the master's grave face with a half-apologetic smile and wearied gesture. Then she said, "Now take me home!" and dropped the lids of her black eyes, as if to dwell once more in fancy on the mimic stage.

On their way to Mrs. Morpher's, the master thought proper to ridicule the whole performance. Now, he shouldn't wonder if Mliss thought that the young lady who acted so beautifully was really in earnest, and in love with the gentleman who wore such fine clothes. Well, if she were in love with him, it was a very unfortunate thing! "Why?" said Mliss, with an upward sweep of the drooping lid. "Oh! well, he couldn't support his wife at his present salary, and pay so much a week for his fine clothes, and then they wouldn't receive as much wages if they were married as if they were merely lovers—that is," added the master, "if they are not already married to somebody else; but I think the husband of the pretty young countess takes the tickets at the door, or pulls up the curtain, or snuffs the candles, or does something equally refined and elegant. As to the young man with nice clothes, which are really nice now, and must cost at least two and a half or three dollars, not to speak of that mantle of red drugget, which I happen to know the price of, for I bought some of it for my room once—as to this young man, Lissy, he is a pretty good fellow, and if he does drink occasionally, I don't think people ought to take advantage of it, and give him black eyes, and throw him in the mud. Do you? I am sure he might owe me two dollars and a half a long time before I would throw it up in his face, as the fellow did the other night at Wingdam."

Mliss had taken his hand in both of hers, and was trying to look in his eyes, which the young man kept as resolutely averted. Mliss had a faint idea of irony, indulging herself sometimes in a species of sardonic humour, which was equally visible in her actions and her speech. But the young man continued in this strain until they had reached Mrs. Morpher's and he had deposited Mliss in her maternal charge. Waiving the invitation of Mrs. Morpher to refreshment and rest, and shading his eyes with his hand to keep out the blue-eyed Clytemnestra's siren glances, he excused himself, and went home.

For two or three days after the advent of the dramatic company Mliss was late at school, and the master's usual Friday afternoon ramble was for once omitted, owing to the absence of his trustworthy guide. As he was putting away his books and preparing to leave the school-house, a small voice piped at his side, "Please, sir?" The master turned, and there stood Aristides Morpher.

"Well, my little man," said the master, impatiently, "what is it? quick!"

"Please, sir, me and 'Kerg' thinks that Mliss is going to run away agin."

"What's that, sir?" said the master, with that unjust testiness with which we always receive disagreeable news.

"Why, sir, she don't stay home any more, and 'Kerg' and me see her talking with one of those actor fellers, and she's with him now; and please, sir, yesterday she told 'Kerg' and me she could make a speech as well as Miss Cellerstina Montmoressy, and she spouted right off by heart;" and the little fellow paused in a collapsed condition.

"What actor?" asked the master.

"Him as wears the shiny hat. And hair. And gold pin. And gold chain," said the just Aristides, putting periods for commas to eke out his breath.

The master put on his gloves and hat, feeling an unpleasant tightness in his chest and thorax, and walked out in the road. Aristides trotted along by his side, endeavouring to keep pace with his short legs to the master's strides, when the master stopped suddenly, and Aristides bumped up against him. "Where were they talking?" asked the master, as if continuing the conversation.

"At the Arcade," said Aristides.

When they reached the main street the master paused. "Run down home," said he to the boy. "If Mliss is there, come to the Arcade and tell me. If she isn't there, stay home; run!" And off trotted the short-legged Aristides.

The Arcade was just across the way—a long, rambling building, containing a bar-room, billiard-room, and restaurant. As the young man crossed the plaza he noticed that two or three of the passers-by turned and looked after him. He looked at his clothes, took out his handkerchief and wiped his face, before he entered the bar-room. It contained the usual number of loungers, who stared at him as he entered. One of

them looked at him so fixedly, and with such a strange expression, that the master stopped and looked again, and then saw it was only his own reflection in a large mirror. This made the master think that perhaps he was a little excited, and so he took up a copy of the Red Mountain Banner from one of the tables, and tried to recover his composure by reading the column of advertisements.

He then walked through the bar-room, through the restaurant, and into the billiard-room. The child was not there. In the latter apartment a person was standing by one of the tables with a broad-brimmed glazed hat on his head. The master recognised him as the agent of the dramatic company; he had taken a dislike to him at their first meeting, from the peculiar fashion of wearing his beard and hair. Satisfied that the object of his search was not there, he turned to the man with a glazed hat. He had noticed the master, but tried that common trick of unconsciousness in which vulgar natures always fail. Balancing a billiard-cue in his hand, he pretended to play with a ball in the centre of the table. The master stood opposite to him until he raised his eyes; when their glances met, the master walked up to him.

He had intended to avoid a scene or quarrel, but when he began to speak, something kept rising in his throat and retarded his utterance, and his own voice frightened him, it sounded so distant, low, and resonant. "I understand," he began, "that Melissa Smith, an orphan, and one of my scholars, has talked with you about adopting your profession. Is that so?"

The man with the glazed hat leaned over the table, and made an imaginary shot, that sent the ball spinning round the cushions, then walking round the table, he recovered the ball, and placed it upon the spot. This duty discharged, getting ready for another shot, he said—

"S'pose she has?"

The master choked up again, but squeezing the cushion of the table in his gloved hand, he went on—

"If you are a gentleman, I have only to tell you that I am her guardian, and responsible for her career. You know as well as I do the kind of life you offer her. As you may learn of any one here, I have already brought her out of an existence worse than death—out of the streets and the contamination of vice. I am trying to do so again. Let us talk like men,

She has neither father, mother, sister, nor brother. Are you seeking to give her an equivalent for these ? ”

The man with the glazed hat examined the point of his cue, and then looked around for somebody to enjoy the joke with him.

“ I know that she is a strange, wilful girl,” continued the master, “ but she is better than she was. I believe that I have some influence over her still. I beg and hope, therefore, that you will take no further steps in this matter, but as a man, as a gentleman, leave her to me. I am willing—— ” But here something rose again in the master’s throat, and the sentence remained unfinished.

The man with the glazed hat, mistaking the master’s silence, raised his head with a coarse, brutal laugh, and said in a loud voice—

“ Want her yourself, do you ? That cock wont fight here, young man ! ”

The insult was more in the tone than the words, more in the glance than tone, and more in the man’s instinctive nature than all these. The best appreciable rhetoric to this kind of animal is a blow. The master felt this, and, with his pent-up nervous energy finding expression in the one act, he struck the brute full in his grinning face. The blow sent the glazed hat one way and the cue another, and tore the glove and skin from the master’s hand from knuckle to joint. It opened up the corners of the fellow’s mouth, and spoilt the peculiar shape of his beard for some time to come.

There was a shout, an imprecation, a scuffle, and the trampling of many feet. Then the crowd parted right and left, and two sharp quick reports followed each other in rapid succession. Then they closed again about his opponent, and the master was standing alone. He remembered picking bits of burning wadding from his coat-sleeve with his left hand. Someone was holding his other hand. Looking at it, he saw it was still bleeding from the blow, but his fingers were clenched around the handle of a glittering knife. He could not remember when or how he got it.

The man who was holding his hand was Mr. Morpher. He hurried the master to the door, but the master held back, and tried to tell him as well as he could with his parched throat about “ Mliss.” “ It’s all right, my boy,” said Mr. Morpher. “ She’s home ! ” And they passed out into the street together.

As they walked along Mr. Morpher said that Mliss had come running into the house a few moments before, and had dragged him out, saying that somebody was trying to kill the master at the Arcade. Wishing to be alone, the master promised Mr. Morpher that he would not seek the agent again that night, and parted from him, taking the road toward the school-house. He was surprised in nearing it to find the door open—still more surprised to find Mliss sitting there.

The master's nature, as I have hinted before, had, like most sensitive organisations, a selfish basis. The brutal taunt thrown out by his late adversary still rankled in his heart. It was possible, he thought, that such a construction might be put upon his affection for the child, which at best was foolish and Quixotic. Besides, had she not voluntarily abnegated his authority and affection? And what had everybody else said about her? Why should he alone combat the opinion of all, and be at last obliged tacitly to confess the truth of all they had predicted? And he had been a participant in a low bar-room fight with a common boor, and risked his life to prove what? What had he proved? Nothing. What would the people say? What would his friends say? What would McSnagley say?

In his self-accusation the last person he should have wished to meet was Mliss. He entered the door, and, going up to his desk, told the child, in a few cold words, that he was busy, and wished to be alone. As she rose, he took her vacant seat, and, sitting down, buried his head in his hands. When he looked up again she was still standing there. She was looking at his face with an anxious expression.

"Did you kill him?" she asked.

"No!" said the master.

"That's what I gave you the knife for!" said the child, quickly.

"Gave me the knife!" repeated the master, in bewilderment.

"Yes, gave you the knife. I was there under the bar. Saw you hit him; saw you both fall. He dropped his old knife. I gave it to you. Why didn't you stick him?" said Mliss, rapidly, with an expressive twinkle of the black eyes and a gesture of the little red hand.

The master could only look his astonishment.

"Yes," said Mliss. "If you'd asked me, I'd told you I was

off with the play-actors. Why was I off with the play-actors? Because you wouldn't tell me you was going away. I knew it. I heard you tell the Doctor so. I wasn't a goin' to stay here alone with those Morphers. I'd rather die first."

With a dramatic gesture which was perfectly consistent with her character, she drew from her bosom a few limp green leaves, and, holding them out at arm's-length, said in her quick vivid way, and in the queer pronunciation of her old life, which she fell into when unduly excited—

"That's the poison plant you said would kill me. I'll go with the play-actors, or I'll eat this and die here. I don't care which. I won't stay here, where they hate and despise me! Neither would you let me, if you didn't hate and despise me too!"

The passionate little breast heaved, and two big tears peeped over the edge of Mliss's eyelids, but she whisked them away with the corner of her apron as if they had been wasps.

"If you lock me up in jail," said Mliss, fiercely, "to keep me from the play-actors, I'll poison myself. Father killed himself—why shouldn't I? You said a mouthful of that root would kill me, and I always carry it here," and she struck her breast with her clenched fist.

The master thought of the vacant plot beside Smith's grave, and of the passionate little figure before him. Seizing her hands in his, and looking full into her truthful eyes, he said—

"Lissy, will you go with me?"

The child put her arms around his neck, and said joyfully, "Yes."

"But now—to-night?"

"To-night."

And hand in hand they passed into the road—the narrow road that had once brought her weary feet to the master's door, and which it seemed she should not tread again alone. The stars glittered brightly above them. For good or ill, the lesson had been learned, and behind them the school of Red Mountain closed upon them for ever.





## THE IDYLL OF RED GULCH

SANDY was very drunk. He was lying under an azalea-bush, in pretty much the same attitude in which he had fallen some hours before. How long he had been lying there he could not tell, and didn't care; how long he should lie there was a matter equally indefinite and unconsidered. A tranquil philosophy, born of his physical condition, suffused and saturated his moral being.

The spectacle of a drunken man, and of this drunken man in particular, was not, I grieve to say, of sufficient novelty in Red Gulch to attract attention. Earlier in the day some local satirist had erected a temporary tombstone at Sandy's head, bearing the inscription, "Effects of McCorkle's whisky, —kills at forty rods," with a hand pointing to McCorkle's saloon. But this, I imagine, was, like most local satire, personal, and was a reflection upon the unfairness of the process rather than a commentary upon the impropriety of the result. With this facetious exception, Sandy had been undisturbed. A wandering mule, released from his pack, had cropped the scant herbage beside him, and sniffed curiously at the prostrate man; a vagabond dog, with that deep sympathy which the species have for drunken men, had licked his dusty boots, and curled himself up at his feet, and lay there, blinking one eye in the sunlight, with a simulation of dissipation that was ingenious and dog-like in its implied flattery of the unconscious man beside him.

Meanwhile, the shadows of the pine-trees had slowly swung around until they crossed the road, and their trunks barred the open meadow with gigantic parallels of black and yellow. Little puffs of red dust, lifted by the plunging hoofs of passing teams, dispersed in a grimy shower upon the recumbent man. The sun sank lower and lower; and still Sandy stirred not. And then the repose of this philosopher was disturbed, as other philosophers have been, by the intrusion of an unphilosophical sex.

"Miss Mary," as she was known to the little flock that she had just dismissed from the log school-house beyond the pines, was taking her afternoon walk. Observing an unusually fine cluster of blossoms on the azalea-bush opposite, she crossed the road to pluck it—picking her way through the red dust, not without certain fierce little shivers of disgust, and some feline circumlocution. And then she came suddenly upon Sandy!

Of course she uttered the little *staccato* cry of her sex. But when she had paid that tribute to her physical weakness she became over-bold, and halted for a moment,—at least six feet from this prostrate monster,—with her white skirts gathered in her hand, ready for flight. But neither sound nor motion came from the bush. With one little foot she then overturned the satirical head-board, and muttered "Beasts!"—an epithet which probably, at that moment, conveniently classified in her mind the entire male population of Red Gulch. For Miss Mary, being possessed of certain rigid notions of her own, had not, perhaps, properly appreciated the demonstrative gallantry for which the Californian has been so justly celebrated by his brother Californians, and had, as a newcomer, perhaps fairly earned the reputation of being "stuck up."

As she stood there she noticed also that the slant sunbeams were heating Sandy's head to what she judged to be an unhealthy temperature, and that his hat was lying uselessly at his side. To pick it up and to place it over his face was a work requiring some courage, particularly as his eyes were open. Yet she did it, and made good her retreat. But she was somewhat concerned, on looking back, to see that the hat was removed, and that Sandy was sitting up and saying something.

The truth was, that in the calm depths of Sandy's mind he was satisfied that the rays of the sun were beneficial and healthful; that from childhood he had objected to lying down in a hat; that no people but condemned fools, past redemption, ever wore hats; and that his right to dispense with them when he pleased was inalienable. This was the statement of his inner consciousness. Unfortunately, its outward expression was vague, being limited to a repetition of the following formula:—"Su'shine all ri! Wasser maär, eh? Wass up, su'shine?"

Miss Mary stopped, and, taking fresh courage from her vantage of distance, asked him if there was anything that he wanted.

"Waas up? Wasser maär?" continued Sandy, in a very high key.

"Get up, you horrid man!" said Miss Mary, now thoroughly incensed; "get up, and go home."

Sandy staggered to his feet. He was six feet high, and Miss Mary trembled. He started forward a few paces and then stopped.

"Wass I go home for?" he suddenly asked, with great gravity.

"Go and take a bath," replied Miss Mary, eyeing his grimy person with great disfavour.

To her infinite dismay, Sandy suddenly pulled off his coat and vest, threw them on the ground, kicked off his boots, and, plunging wildly forward, darted headlong over the hill in the direction of the river.

"Goodness Heavens!—the man will be drowned!" said Miss Mary; and then, with feminine inconsistency, she ran back to the school-house, and locked herself in.

That night, while seated at supper with her hostess, the blacksmith's wife, it came to Miss Mary to ask, demurely, if her husband ever got drunk. "Abner," responded Mrs. Stidger, reflectively, "let's see: Abner hasn't been tight since last 'lection." Miss Mary would have liked to ask if he preferred lying in the sun on these occasions, and if a cold bath would have hurt him; but this would have involved an explanation which she did not then care to give. So she contented herself with opening her grey eyes widely at the red-cheeked Mrs. Stidger—a fine specimen of South-western efflorescence—and then dismissed the subject altogether. The next day she wrote to her dearest friend in Boston: "I think I find the intoxicated portion of this community the least objectionable. I refer, my dear, to the men, of course. I do not know anything that could make the women tolerable."

In less than a week Miss Mary had forgotten this episode, except that her afternoon walks took thereafter, almost unconsciously, another direction. She noticed, however, that every morning a fresh cluster of azalea-blossoms appeared among the flowers on her desk. This was not strange, as

her little flock were aware of her fondness for flowers, and invariably kept her desk bright with anemones, syringas, and lupines ; but, on questioning them, they, one and all, professed ignorance of the azaleas. A few days later, Master Johnny Stidger, whose desk was nearest to the window, was suddenly taken with spasms of apparently gratuitous laughter, that threatened the discipline of the school. All that Miss Mary could get from him was that some one had been " looking in the winder." Irate and indignant, she sallied from her hive to do battle with the intruder. As she turned the corner of the school-house she came plump upon the quondam drunkard, —now perfectly sober, and inexpressibly sheepish and guilty-looking.

These facts Miss Mary was not slow to take a feminine advantage of in her present humour. But it was somewhat confusing to observe, also, that the beast, despite some faint signs of past dissipation, was amiable-looking—in fact, a kind of blond Samson, whose corn-coloured silken beard apparently had never yet known the touch of barber's razor or Delilah's shears. So that the cutting speech which quivered on her ready tongue died upon her lips, and she contented herself with receiving his stammering apology with supercilious eyelids and the gathered skirts of uncontamination. When she re-entered the school-room her eyes fell upon the azaleas with a new sense of revelation. And then she laughed, and the little people all laughed, and they were all unconsciously very happy.

It was on a hot day—and not long after this—that two short-legged boys came to grief on the threshold of the school with a pail of water which they had laboriously brought from the spring, and that Miss Mary compassionately seized the pail and started for the spring herself. At the foot of the hill a shadow crossed her path, and a blue-shirted arm dexterously, but gently, relieved her of her burden. Miss Mary was both embarrassed and angry. " If you carried more of that for yourself," she said, spitefully, to the blue arm, without deigning to raise her lashes to its owner, " you'd do better." In the submissive silence that followed she regretted the speech, and thanked him so sweetly at the door that he stumbled ; which caused the children to laugh again, a laugh in which Miss Mary joined, until the colour came faintly into her pale cheek. The next day a barrel was mysteriously

placed beside the door, and as mysteriously filled with fresh spring-water every morning.

Nor was this superior young person without other quiet attentions. "Profane Bill," driver of the Slumgullion Stage, widely known in the newspapers for his "gallantry" in invariably offering the box seat to the fair sex, had excepted Miss Mary from this attention, on the ground that he had a habit of "cussin' on up grades," and gave her half the coach to herself. Jack Hamlin, a gambler, having once silently ridden with her in the same coach, afterward threw a decanter at the head of a confederate for mentioning her name in a bar-room. The over-dressed mother of a pupil whose paternity was doubtful had often lingered near this astute Vestal's temple, never daring to enter its sacred precincts, but content to worship the priestess from afar.

With such unconscious intervals the monotonous procession of blue skies, glittering sunshine, brief twilights, and starlit nights passed over Red Gulch. Miss Mary grew fond of walking in the sedate and proper woods. Perhaps she believed, with Mrs. Stidger, that the balsamic odours of the firs "did her chest good," for certainly her slight cough was less frequent and her step was firmer; perhaps she had learned the unending lesson which the patient pines are never weary of repeating to heedful or listless ears. And so, one day, she planned a picnic on Buckeye Hill, and took the children with her. Away from the dusty road, the straggling shanties, the yellow ditches, the clamour of restless engines, the cheap finery of shop windows, the deeper glitter of paint and coloured glass, and the thin veneering which barbarism takes upon itself in such localities—what infinite relief was theirs! The last heap of ragged rock and clay passed, the last unsightly chasm crossed—how the waiting woods opened their long files to receive them! How the children—perhaps because they had not yet grown quite away from the breast of the bounteous mother—threw themselves face downward on her brown bosom with uncouth caresses, filling the air with their laughter; and how Miss Mary herself—felinely fastidious and intrenched as she was in the purity of spotless skirts, collar, and cuffs—forgot all, and ran like a crested quail at the head of her brood, until, romping, laughing, and panting, with a loosened braid of brown hair, a hat hanging by a knotted ribbon from her throat, she came suddenly and violently,

in the heart of the forest, upon—the luckless Sandy!

The explanations, apologies, and not over-wise conversation that ensued, need not be indicated here. It would seem, however, that Miss Mary had already established some acquaintance with this ex-drunkard. Enough that he was soon accepted as one of the party; that the children, with that quick intelligence which Providence gives the helpless, recognised a friend, and played with his blond beard and long silken moustache, and took other liberties—as the helpless are apt to do. And when he had built a fire against a tree, and had shown them other mysteries of wood-craft, their admiration knew no bounds. At the close of two such foolish, idle, happy hours he found himself lying at the feet of the schoolmistress, gazing dreamily in her face, as she sat upon the sloping hillside, weaving wreaths of laurel and syringa, in very much the same attitude as he had lain when first they met. Nor was the similitude greatly forced. The weakness of an easy, sensuous nature, that had found a dreamy exaltation in liquor, it is to be feared was now finding an equal intoxication in love.

I think that Sandy was dimly conscious of this himself. I know that he longed to be doing something—slaying a grizzly, scalping a savage, or sacrificing himself in some way for the sake of this fallow-faced, grey-eyed schoolmistress. As I should like to present him in a heroic attitude, I stay my hand with great difficulty at this moment, being only withheld from introducing such an episode by a strong conviction that it does not usually occur at such times. And I trust that my fairest reader, who remembers that, in a real crisis, it is always some uninteresting stranger or unromantic policeman, and not Adolphus, who rescues, will forgive the omission.

So they sat there undisturbed, the woodpeckers chattering overhead, and the voices of the children coming pleasantly from the hollow below. What they said matters little. What they thought—which might have been interesting—did not transpire. The woodpeckers only learned how Miss Mary was an orphan; how she left her uncle's house to come to California, for the sake of health and independence; how Sandy was an orphan, too; how he came to California for excitement; how he had lived a wild life, and how he was trying to reform; and other details, which, from a wood-

pecker's view-point, undoubtedly must have seemed stupid and a waste of time. But even in such trifles was the afternoon spent ; and when the children were again gathered, and Sandy, with a delicacy which the school mistress well understood, took leave of them quietly at the outskirts of the settlement, it had seemed the shortest day of her weary life.

As the long, dry summer withered to its roots, the school term of Red Gulch—to use a local euphuism—“dried up” also. In another day Miss Mary would be free ; and for a season, at least, Red Gulch would know her no more. She was seated alone in the school-house, her cheek resting on her hand, her eyes half-closed in one of those day-dreams in which Miss Mary—I fear, to the danger of school discipline—was lately in the habit of indulging. Her lap was full of mosses, ferns, and other woodland memories. She was so pre-occupied with these and her own thoughts that a gentle tapping at the door passed unheard, or translated itself into the remembrance of far-off woodpeckers. When at last it asserted itself more distinctly, she started up with a flushed cheek and opened the door. On the threshold stood a woman, the self-assertion and audacity of whose dress were in singular contrast to her timid, irresolute bearing.

Miss Mary recognised at a glance the dubious mother of her anonymous pupil. Perhaps she was disappointed, perhaps she was only fastidious ; but as she coldly invited her to enter, she half unconsciously settled her white cuffs and collar, and gathered closer her own chaste skirts. It was, perhaps, for this reason that the embarrassed stranger, after a moment's hesitation, left her gorgeous parasol open, and sticking in the dust beside the door, and then sat down at the farther end of a long bench. Her voice was husky as she began :—

“I heerd tell that you were goin' down to the Bay to-morrow, and I couldn't let you go until I came to thank you for your kindness to my Tommy.”

“Tommy,” Miss Mary said, “was a good boy, and deserved more than the poor attention she could give him.”

“Thank you, miss ; thank ye !” cried the stranger, brightening even through the colour which Red Gulch knew facetiously as her “war-paint,” and striving, in her embarrassment, to drag the long bench nearer the schoolmistress. “I thank you, miss, for that ! and if I am his mother, there ain't a sweeter, dearer, better boy lives than him. And if I ain't



much as says it, thar ain't a sweeter, dearer, angeler teacher lives than he's got."

Miss Mary, sitting primly behind her desk, with a ruler over her shoulder, opened her grey eyes widely at this, but said nothing.

"It ain't for you to be complimented by the like of me, I know," she went on, hurriedly. "It ain't for me to be comin' here, in broad day, to do it, either; but I come to ask a favour,—not for me, miss—not for me, but for the darling boy."

Encouraged by a look in the young schoolmistress's eye, and putting her lilac-gloved hands together, the fingers downward, between her knees, she went on, in a low voice:—

"You see, miss, there's no one the boy has any claim on but me, and I ain't the proper person to bring him up. I thought some, last year, of sending him away to 'Frisco to school, but when they talked of bringing a schoolma'am here, I waited till I saw you, and then I knew it was all right, and I could keep my boy a little longer. And O, miss, he loves you so much; and if you could hear him talk about you, in his pretty way, and if he could ask you what I ask you now, you couldn't refuse him."

"It is natural," she went on, rapidly, in a voice that trembled strangely between pride and humility—"it's natural that he should take to you, miss, for his father, when I first knew him, was a gentleman—and the boy must forget me, sooner or later—and so I ain't a-goin' to cry about that. For I come to ask you to take my Tommy—God bless him for the bestest, sweetest boy that lives—to—to—take him with you."

She had risen and caught the young girl's hand in her own, and had fallen on her knees beside her.

"I've money plenty, and it's all yours and his. Put him in some good school, where you can go and see him, and help him to—to—to forget his mother. Do with him what you like. The worst you can do will be kindness to what he will learn with me. Only take him out of this wicked life, this cruel place, this home of shame and sorrow. You will; I know you will—won't you? You will—you must not, you cannot say no! You will make him as pure, as gentle as yourself; and when he has grown up, you will tell him his father's name—the name that hasn't passed my lips for years—the name of Alexander Morton, whom they call here Sandy! Miss Mary!

—do not take your hand away! Miss Mary, speak to me! You will take my boy? Do not put your face from me. I know it ought not to look on such as me. Miss Mary!—my God, be merciful!—she is leaving me!”

Miss Mary had risen, and, in the gathering twilight, had felt her way to the open window. She stood there, leaning against the casement, her eyes fixed on the last rosy tints that were fading from the western sky. There was still some of its light on her pure young forehead, on her white collar, on her clasped white hands, but all fading slowly away. The suppliant had dragged herself, still on her knees, beside her.

“I know it takes time to consider. I will wait here all night; but I cannot go until you speak. Do not deny me now. You will!—I see it in your sweet face—such a face as I have seen in my dreams. I see it in your eyes, Miss Mary!—you will take my boy!”

The last red beam crept higher, suffused Miss Mary’s eyes with something of its glory, flickered, and faded, and went out. The sun had set on Red Gulch. In the twilight and silence Miss Mary’s voice sounded pleasantly.

“I will take the boy. Send him to me to-night.”

The happy mother raised the hem of Miss Mary’s skirts to her lips. She would have buried her hot face in its virgin folds, but she dared not. She rose to her feet.

“Does—this man—know of your intention?” asked Miss Mary, suddenly.

“No, nor cares. He has never even seen the child to know it.”

“Go to him at once—to-night—now! Tell him what you have done. Tell him I have taken his child, and tell him—he must never see—see—the child again. Wherever it may be, he must not come; wherever I may take it, he must not follow! There, go now, please—I’m weary, and—have much yet to do!”

They walked together to the door. On the threshold the woman turned.

“Good-night.”

She would have fallen at Miss Mary’s feet. But at the same moment the young girl reached out her arms, caught the sinful woman to her own pure breast for one brief moment, and then closed and locked the door.

It was with a sudden sense of great responsibility that Profane Bill took the reins of the Slumgullion Stage the next morning, for the schoolmistress was one of his passengers. As he entered the high road, in obedience to a pleasant voice from the "inside," he suddenly reined up his horses and respectfully waited, as "Tommy" hopped out at the command of Miss Mary.

"Not that bush, Tommy—the next."

Tommy whipped out his new pocket-knife, and cutting a branch from a tall azalea-bush, returned with it to Miss Mary.

"All right now?"

"All right."

And the stage-door closed on the Idyll of Red Gulch.

ETHEL M. DELL

*The Tenth Point*

Ethel M. Dell needs no introduction to any reader of fiction. Since the publication of *The Way of an Eagle* in 1912 she has written more than thirty novels and volumes of stories, of which millions of copies have been sold all over the world. In private life she is the wife of Lt.-Col. G. T. Savage, D.S.O.



## THE TENTH POINT

"IT must be dull work being a sailor's wife," said Hilda Davenant sympathetically. "I can never feel thankful enough that Percy didn't choose the sea for his profession.

The girl beside her laughed with a hint of hardness. "Oh, it has its advantages," she said. "There's one thing, anyway, about it. He can't come home and take one by surprise unless his ship is in port—in which case, of course, it behoves one to be on one's guard."

Hilda turned in her gentle way and regarded the speaker for a moment or two in silence. "That's just one of the things you say and don't mean, Hope, dear," she said with conviction.

"Oh, indeed it isn't!" Recklessly the girl made answer.

"As the wife of the great Chester Davenant, I assure you that a husband who doesn't live at home has a great many points in his favour. You naturally disagree fundamentally and entirely. But that, of course, is the result of falling in love and never getting over it, so you are incapable of judging."

"Perhaps I am," agreed Hilda.

"Do you know what Major Temple said to me yesterday?" pursued Hope, with a hint of malice. "Yes, we were discussing you. It was Sunday, you know. And he said, 'Lady Percy Davenant has the soul of a nun. She was never intended to live in this wicked world.' I quite agreed with him for once. How on earth you ever came to marry Percy and to keep on being in love with him for ever and ever I cannot conceive!"

Hilda laughed. "My dear, how very little you know of either of us! Since we first knew each other, we have never wanted anyone else."

"How amazing! Whatever would you have done if he had been on the sea like Chester? Made him retire?"

There was a flash of curiosity in the girl's eyes as she put the question. She was very young—only twenty-three—but her vivid face did not reflect the unquestioning content on that of the elder woman. It had a look of waiting, almost craving, as if she had not found life too generous. She was as one who stands upon the brink of an unknown sea, earnestly searching the skyline for the fairy sail of Romance.

Hilda Davenant looked into the younger face with great tenderness. This girl who had married so unexpectedly into her husband's family was very dear to her, though she did not fully understand her moods.

"No. I wouldn't have made him retire," she said. "I'd just have built a hut on the last little bit of England and lighted a beacon for him every night."

Hope broke into a laugh of irresistible merriment. "Oh, Hilda darling! I hear echoes of the cloister in every word you speak! Well, I don't think Chester, anyway, would appreciate that sort of attention. We are not quite so mediæval as that, thank goodness. He goes his way, and I go mine."

"Yes you are very modern," Hilda said. "But don't forget, dear, that whatever he says, Chester's ideas are not of the very advanced type. He prefers modesty to modernity; always has."

"Oh, I know. He's a funny old thing is your Uncle Chester," conceded Hope. "Forty-three next month. Can you believe it? It's a pity I didn't know him when he was a sub. I believe we should have got on excellently then."

"I don't believe boys really attract you, all the same," said Hilda.

Hope laughed. "Oh, they're all right to play with. I couldn't marry a boy, of course. I'm not sure that I was really intended to marry anyone." A sudden sigh caught her unawares. She turned it into a yawn. "But being married is quite useful if you want to have a good time. Do you know, dear, I think I shall have to go and dress, if you don't mind? I have an engagement for to-night."

She got up with a swift movement, stretching her arms wide as she did so, then as swiftly stooped and clasped her friend round the neck.

"I know you came to give me advice, Hilda. It was sweet of you to refrain. I appreciate it ever so much more for being left unsaid. But I must get a little fun out of life while I can.

It's so short. At least the good part is. And, after all"—a quick note of passion sounded unexpectedly in her lowered voice—"I've nothing else, have I? I must do something."

"My dear!" Hilda said.

She held her closely, but she said no more. It was true that she had come to utter a gentle word of warning, but somehow she had been checked at the outset. Hope was so amazingly sweet. How could anyone find fault with her? Besides, what had she done, after all?

Perhaps she had been a little giddy, but what girl in her circumstances would have been otherwise? Married to a man nearly twice her age, of whom she saw next to nothing, possessing no ties since the death of her father had left her lonely, caught by the whirl and the glamour of a society, of which before her marriage she had had no experience, what wonder if the glitter had somewhat turned her head?

But yet she had done no wrong. And Hilda Davenant, in her warm-hearted love for the girl, was convinced that she possessed the strength to steer a straight course. There was a vein of hardness in Hope which she believed to be her safeguard. Reckless she might be, yet she was not wholly without caution. Something—possibly some past experience—had implanted in her a wariness of which only the few were conscious. With all her charm and the wonderful quick beauty of her, she knew how to hold her own. She kept the helm in her own hands, surrendering it to none. She was daring, yet no one ever caught her at a disadvantage. Even Meredith Temple, known in his world as "the hero of a hundred flights" and an easy conqueror of hearts by reason of his prowess in the air, had never been able to boast of a single victory gained over her. She would accept his escort to theatre or opera one night, and throw him over with the briefest word of regret a couple of days later if she had made some engagement with him that did not suit her mood when the time came.

The wonder, universally expressed, was that he submitted to this treatment. For Temple was a man accustomed to a considerable amount of adulation, and to trifle with him was not considered a very safe pastime with the majority. A good many women were frankly afraid of him. He certainly could be formidable when he chose.

Yet Hope, with her girlish daring, knew no fear. She



dwelt alone in her little flat close to Percy Davenant's great town house, and she pleased herself. Her husband and Hilda's were uncle and nephew, though there were but a few years between them. Chester Davenant was a rising man in the Navy, and marriage was the last thing that anyone had expected of him. Yet he had married a girl whom he had met by chance in a Paris café in which her father had been taken suddenly ill. He had gone to the man's assistance and had learnt more from the girl in her distress than she would otherwise have imparted to a total stranger. For Hope's father had never made a success of life, and the two were near to starvation. Chester Davenant had stood by them and saved them from utter shipwreck, and finally had silenced all protests on Hope's part by offering her marriage. She had accepted him; perhaps because there was no other course.

And so Chester had married her, and gone back to the sea; and Hope and her father had been established in the little flat that the sailor had provided for his young wife.

Here, barely two months later, Hope's father had died, and it was then that Hilda Davenant had come forward to help the girl. She would, in fact, have taken her completely under her protection but for a curious instinct of independence in Hope which rendered this impossible. Hope had readily accepted her friendship, but she had steadily declined to surrender her liberty. She preferred to live alone, and it was only of late that she had fully entered the society in which Hilda had moved all her life. To do so under Hilda's auspices was as favourable an introduction as any young married woman could desire; but Hope had very swiftly formed a circle of her own. It was inevitable with her quick graciousness and charm of manner. She seemed to radiate sunshine, and she gathered popularity wherever she went. There was about her an almost childish *joie de vivre* that attracted all the world. She became the craze of the hour. Her simplicity, her sweetness, her total absence of vanity made her a universal favourite. She was one who had never known care, and only Hilda Davenant was aware of that curious inward hardness behind which Hope of the sunny eyes and careless laughter hid her woman's heart.

Meredith Temple had been in contact with it more than once without recognising it. He was wont to tell her that she had no heart, and she always carelessly agreed. But what

was the use of a heart, she would daringly ask him? She was sure he had packed his away in lavender long since. And protest was useless, for she laughed it all away.

She was always laughing, always full of life. No one saw her in her serious moments, and only Hilda suspected that they even existed.

She was laughing when she dressed that night and pinned a splendid golden rose in her black hair. She was dressed in black and gold—her favourite blend—and she looked like a young goddess with the morning glory in her eyes.

Temple had to wait some minutes in her little drawing-room, but when he saw her there was naught but appreciation in his look. He took her hand and held it for a long second, till she uttered her rippling laugh.

"Well? What is the matter? What are you looking at?"

"You!" he said with a deep breath. "Do you really belong to this world, I wonder?"

Her laugh took a mocking note. "*Mais vraiment!* Is that a compliment or otherwise?"

"It is neither," said Meredith Temple, with a quick gleam in his dark eyes. "You dazzled me, that's all; I should never pay you compliments. I doubt if I could."

She withdrew her hand airily from his. "Very daintily conveyed! How do you manage to be so patient?"

"Because you are worth waiting for," he said, taking the cloak from her arm. She turned for him to place it about her shoulders.

"You wouldn't say that if you were married," she observed, with her back to him.

"I should if I were married to you," he rejoined.

His hands lingered for a second or two over his task, but she gathered the cloak swiftly around her and turned. Her eyes, deeply blue and sparkling as a sapphire sparkles in strong sunshine, challenged him.

"I wonder you venture to say that," she said, "with my husband's example before you. He is just an instance of the invariable rule."

"What rule?" questioned Temple, his look still comprehending her.

She made a gesture that seemed to veil more than it expressed. "That—after marriage—it is the woman who waits."

Temple drew another deep breath. "By Jupiter!" he said, "I wouldn't keep you waiting—in his place."

She moved away from him with a laugh that was oddly tremulous. "How do you know? You've never been caught in the slough of marriage—and if you're wise you never will be."

"You call it that?" the man said, his voice pitched very low, almost as if he could not trust it.

And the woman laughed with more assurance. "Just—that!" she said lightly. "I should keep out of it if I were you."

. . . . .

They went to the theatre together and sat in the stalls in full view of any who cared to take note of their presence. That was ever Hope Davenant's way. What she did, she did openly, disdaining criticism. When Lady Burnley, who was essentially a power in her own world, levelled her glasses at her from a box, she was wholly unimpressed and even flung a smile in the censor's direction. After all, what was the good of being married if one did not escape all leading-strings thereby? She had not been reared in any strict school of convention and she frankly despised the bare thought of it now. She was free, and she cherished her freedom as the only blessing that marriage had brought her.

So, supremely indifferent to the disapproval of that grim regard, she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the moment, entering into it with that keenness of interest which was so largely the secret of her charm.

It was quite evident that Temple enjoyed himself also. The play was a clever one. They saw it with the same eyes, and if only one of them were engrossed thereby it was through no lack of sympathy on the part of the other.

"Are we going straight back?" he asked her under cover of the last scene.

She nodded, not looking towards him. "Of course."

"Of course!" he echoed softly, a hint of mockery in his voice. "I didn't suggest anything else, did I?"

She did not answer. The play was over, and the lights went up. They went out with the crowd.

In the vestibule they were kept waiting for Temple's car, and for a few moments Hope stood alone. A little chill went

through her as the night air blew in. The streets were wet and shining. She stood against a pillar to avoid the crush of people that swept about her.

The place was a buzz of voices to which she paid no heed. She was still under the spell of the play. It had ended on an unusual note, and it had stirred her strangely, very curiously piercing the cynicism that had grown like a fungus about her heart of late.

She was glad when Temple returned and led her away to the waiting car.

"Very tired?" he asked, as they slid through the lighted streets.

"No," she said. "No, I enjoyed it. It's a splendid play."

"High art," said Temple. "Love as it might be—not love as it is."

"I don't know," she made answer. "I think it was fairly convincing."

"To the idealists," said Temple.

"No!" With a touch of imperiousness she contradicted him. "To ordinary everyday people—like myself. I am sure—quite sure—that love—the real thing—is like that."

"How much do you know of the real thing?" he said, and laid his hand on hers.

She made a gesture, freeing herself. "I know nothing," she told him, with bitter simplicity. "It hasn't come my way at all. Yet—somehow," her voice sank; it was almost as if she uttered the words to herself, "I know that it exists—and it is the greatest thing in life."

"How do you know it hasn't come your way?" said Temple.

She answered him almost tremulously. "Because I am not one of the lucky ones. I don't think there are many of them, in any case; but only the few realise that. They don't always know it themselves—when it comes. And so it gets wasted."

"Wasted on the wrong person?" suggested Temple.

She clasped her hands together in the darkness. "Yes."

"You wouldn't do that," he contended. "You were made to love and be loved."

She uttered a faint laugh. "I really don't know what I was made for. Life is such a funny jumble. I suppose we are living in the Dark Ages still."

"Some of us haven't even begun to live at present," remarked Temple.

She turned towards him with a hint of eagerness. "Oh, do you feel that too?"

"I do—very seriously in some respects." His voice had a note of raillery. "And life is short, you know. It's a pity to waste time."

She caught back a sudden sigh. "Some of us find it difficult to kill it," she said.

"Is that your experience?" He dropped his bantering tone abruptly. "You wouldn't say that if you went flying," he said. "It's the best cure for *ennui* I know."

It was the final touch. Her vision vanished like a dream. She pulled herself together with a laugh.

"Oh yes, I know. There is nothing like the risk of a violent death to make one love life. I should revel in it if I were a man."

"Why make conditions?" laughed Temple. "You could revel in it now if you chose."

"I?" Hope drew in her breath like an excited child.

"Of course! Why not? Now—to-morrow—any time—if you felt so disposed."

She broke into a laugh. "You're just teasing! You know you wouldn't take me—even if I'd come."

"Will you come?" he said.

She met his eyes. "You wouldn't take me," she reiterated.

"Will you come?" he said again.

She nodded. "Yes. All right. I'll come."

They were passing up a lighted street. The shadows came and went upon his face; he was looking at her intently.

"You mean that?" he said.

She nodded again. "Of course I do! When shall we start? And where are we going?"

"We'll start to-morrow," he said deliberately. "I'll send for you in this—early—six-thirty. Will you be ready?"

He was daring her, she knew. A sudden wild spirit of adventure entered into her. She laughed in his face.

"Yes, I shall be ready, O winged cavalier! But—we shan't go—for all that."

"Why not?" he said.

"Because you will back out. You don't take women up. I've heard that a dozen times."

"I will take one woman"—said Meredith Temple.

"I am indeed honoured." She made a dainty gesture of homage. "I shall lie awake all night with anticipation. And in the morning——"

"Yes, in the morning?" he said, still closely watching her.

"In the morning I shall receive a polite note to say the machine is unfit for a voyage," she said lightly. "And I shall turn over and have a sleep, and then get up—bored to death."

"That won't happen," said Temple.

The car had turned into the square in which she lived. There were few lights and they could not see each other's faces.

"You wouldn't be afraid to come with me?" the man asked suddenly.

"Afraid! Good gracious, no! Why should I be afraid?" Her voice had a curious ring, half challenging, half interrogatory.

The car came softly to a standstill. For a moment they sat in the darkness without moving.

Then, with complete carelessness, Temple spoke. "That's settled, then. I will send round for you at six-thirty. And neither of us will back out—whatever happens."

He descended with the words and offered her his hand. She placed hers within it with instant confidence.

"Amen!" she said. "I shall be ready."

"And I shall be waiting," said Meredith Temple, with a smile.

As Hope had jestingly predicted, she did not sleep much that night. A breathless sense of excitement held her. To go up on an unofficial flight with Meredith Temple was a prospect so unexpected and so alluring that she could not detach her thoughts therefrom. His sudden suggestion had been a complete surprise to her, for it was well known that he had a rooted objection to flying with the uninitiated, and that he had chosen her as his first woman passenger stirred her pride with an eager thrill. It was the highest compliment he could possibly have paid her. She quivered with eagerness at the thought of what lay before her, and arose more than once to study the calm night sky.

The hours seemed interminable, and the first light of day

found her feverishly dressing for the adventure. She was like a child again in her eagerness. She had no thought for anything but the dazzling experience that awaited her. The morning broke with a lavish splendour that seemed almost to intoxicate her. She laughed aloud as she prepared for the wonderful expedition. She felt as if she had stepped into a fairy tale, and no doubts or misgivings of any sort assailed her. Her horizon was cloudless as the blue above her.

She scribbled a brief note to her maid to announce the fact of her possible absence for the greater part of the day, made herself a cup of chocolate, being too full of excitement to eat anything, and then she was ready.

Punctual to the hour appointed, Temple's car made its appearance in the square. She was outside the house by that time, pacing to and fro with unconcealed impatience. There was no one about besides herself, but the first stirring of early morning had begun to be heard in the houses around. A window squeaked here, a blind clattered there. The world was awaking.

Hope paid no heed to these things. It was nothing to her whether she were observed or not. An irresponsible feeling of holiday-making possessed her. She was going for a picnic which concerned none but herself. There was nothing furtive about her departure. She drove away in the empty car in high triumph. The morning was brilliant, but a brisk wind was blowing, and the sky was no longer free of clouds. There was a touch of keenness in the air also that seemed to make her blood run faster. She laughed to herself as they sped through the empty streets to the great aerodrome.

The glow of the adventure made of her beauty a sparkling radiance. She saw the quick wonder and admiration that sprang to Temple's eyes as he met her, and laughed again. She was giddy with the joy of life.

"So you haven't backed out?" she said, as her hand lay in his.

His look flashed over her with a fiery admiration that seemed to encompass her with an all-pervading warmth. "I have been waiting for hours," he said. "Have you breakfasted? No? Then come in here!"

He drew her into a shed from which he had come forth to greet her, and showed her a tray with hot coffee and rolls upon it.

"My mechanic is doing a final inspection," he said. "Sit down! I knew you would come fasting."

She laughed still as she obeyed him. His air of proprietorship amused her. His mastery was wholly pleasant. She suddenly discovered that she was hungry.

"Have you been awake all night?" he asked her point-blank as he waited upon her.

"Have you?" she countered.

"Of course I have. Do you think I would fog my brain with sleep with such an expedition as this before me? Besides, I've been busy. I don't leave anything to chance."

He sat on the edge of the rough table that held their repast, and munched a roll while he watched her.

"Beginning to feel nervous?" he asked her presently.

She scoffed at the idea. "Of course not!"

"Thanks!" he said coolly. "I hope you're prepared to wear a flying-coat and helmet. I can't take you up without."

"I'm prepared for anything," laughed Hope.

"Really?" said Temple.

"Yes, really," she returned gaily.

He got up. "You're out for adventure, I can see. I'll take care not to disappoint you. Do you mind if I take a last look round while you finish? Then I shall be ready."

He left her, and almost immediately there arose the roar of an engine, so close and so deafening that it seemed to fill the world. She sat thrilled and listening, forgetting to eat.

When he returned some minutes later she sprang up like an excited child to meet him. "Oh, do let us start! I can't wait any longer."

He laughed, seeing rather than hearing the words in the din. He was carrying a leather coat in which he enveloped her. She was wearing a cap of soft white wool; but she slipped it off and pushed it into a pocket in readiness for the helmet. He put it on her, buckling it tightly over her throat and fastening the coat above it. His face was close to hers as he did it. The laughter had gone out of it. He looked almost sternly intent upon his task.

Suddenly, as he finished, his eyes came to hers. And, in spite of herself, wholly involuntarily, Hope drew back! He bit his lip sharply, and stepped back himself. Then with a gesture that was oddly tense he motioned her to the doorway.

She passed out before him with a curious feeling of shock.



It was as if he had slammed the door upon something which he had not intended her to see—something of which she had caught but a single burning glimpse.

They went out through the hangars in the morning sunshine, and he came and walked beside her, smoking a cigarette in silence. For the first time she felt embarrassment in his company. But in a very few moments she had forgotten it all in amazed and enthusiastic contemplation of the machine that lay like a fettered eagle upon the ground, whirring and pulsing as if chafing for freedom.

She turned to her companion with eager interest, and in a second his cigarette was tossed away and he was the keen and capable pilot once more. He seemed impatient to be gone, she thought, for his orders were swift and peremptory. He helped her to her seat, and arranged her there with a few words, dropping a packet of chocolate into her lap at the last moment with a brief smile.

The roar of the engine made much talking impossible. She had meant to ask him what direction they would take, and how long they would be up. But the obvious difficulty of making herself heard induced her to refrain. After all, she felt, it did not greatly matter. She had absolute confidence in his skill, and nothing else seemed of any serious importance. At the last moment he drew the goggles down over her eyes, and made some careless remark to her which she did not catch but which nevertheless reassured her completely. She threw him a smile in answer, and then, almost before she realised it, they were off.

They sped over the grass in a semi-circle, bumping on uneven ground, then rose in a throbbing whirr that made her think of a colossal covey of partridges winging upwards. The sun shone blindly in her face as they climbed. Looking down, she saw the world falling away beneath her, and for a few seconds a curious dismay that yet was hardly fear possessed her. Strangely, in those first moments of flight she had the sensation of one who dives in the depths of the sea. Her breathing was suspended and, though she was aware of no distress she harboured a rather awful wonder if she would ever breathe again.

Then, as one who rises to the surface after an incredible period of helpless inertia, she felt her lungs expand, and a draught of air such as she had never breathed before rushed

into them. She closed her eyes in a sheer physical rapture of being that was almost too great to be borne.

She no longer heard the roar of the engine. She was afloat in a magic vessel upon a magic sea, quite motionless, amazingly at ease. And the sparkling air around her was the wine of the gods, the living essence of all enchantment.

It was many minutes later that the wind in her face awoke her from this trance of great contentment, lashing her with a sudden cold fury that aroused her very effectually. It roared against wings and propeller like a destroying monster. It strove to choke her, and well-nigh succeeded. She opened her eyes and looked—then searched—for the world she knew, and found it not. They were adrift in a region of billowing fog, surrounded by a million demons that they could not see but whose shrieking rent the universe. A great horror gripped her—a dread of the unknown—an appalling sense of utter impotence. The thought of annihilation came to her, so infinitesimal had her existence become. She felt herself adrift upon an immensity ungauged, unfathomable, beyond even the outer courts of imagination. Her very personality seemed to be shattered. She was conscious only in a vague and terribly detached fashion of the rush and roar of a tempest of rain.

Then, while she still struggled to maintain some sense of proportion—some grip upon her individuality that seemed to be slipping wholly from her control—a white light shone as through a veil above her, increasing with blinding swiftness, till suddenly the raging storm-fiends fell away into nothingness and they throbbed through shining spaces of unbroken sunshine again, soaring untroubled into the infinite blue.

She saw Temple with the eyes of one awakening from a fearful dream. She heard again the roaring of the engine, and the awful sense of impending catastrophe passed from her. She had come through it. She had survived. Nothing could ever be so terrible again.

Gradually the clouds cleared from below them. She began to have fleeting glimpses of the earth far below. It frightened and bewildered her at first, this looking downwards. But by degrees she became accustomed to the strangeness. She saw it as a magic carpet of untraceable design stretched beneath her—tiny hills and tiny rivers, tiny towns and tiny roadways.

She began to take a child's pleasure in this new wonder, this exquisite fairy world which was surely too minute ever to have contained her. She wished it were not quite so far away. She wanted to draw a little nearer and see its miniature population working like ants over that strangely varying surface. But instead of drawing nearer to it she seemed to be drawing farther and farther away.

Again the sun blinded her. She had a feeling that they were gliding straight up an invisible height to the fiery gates of heaven. And a great awe came upon her, holding her spellbound so that she could look neither up nor down, while the piercing brightness held and compelled her soul.

Then—how it happened she knew not—suddenly the spell was gone. The glaring light flashed in her eyes no longer. She was no longer climbing but falling, falling, into a sheer abyss. Her heart stood still in horror, incredulous, yet overwhelmingly expectant of disaster. Again she saw the world below her, but it was not receding any more. Instead, it rushed upwards to meet her. She turned suddenly sick and faint, and shut her eyes that she might not see the end. . . .

It seemed interminable, that waiting for the final crash. Every nerve in her body was strung to meet it, every pulse seemed to be arrested. And when it came not, when that awful fall turned to a swift, circling ascent, she could not believe that she had lived through it, and sat for a long time, crouched and powerless, contemplating the disaster she had not endured with a stunned feeling of loss.

Later—very much later—she became aware that her heart was still beating, and she looked around her again with a vague stirring of curiosity, wondering how much longer this amazing flight would last. She felt as if she had been in the air for a very long time, and she was overwhelmingly sleepy. She had gone through many emotions, and she was stupid with utter weariness. Her brain felt fogged. She seemed to have parted with all vitality and initiative, to be powerless upon a great tide that was bearing her she knew not whither. They were driving through clouds again, but these were soft and billowy and muffling. There were no storm-fields here.

Once she essayed to look down, but she was encompassed by nothingness. The miniature world had passed completely away like a picture from a screen. Only the blank screen

remained. Again the thought of her companion came to her. Hazily she reflected that he did not appear as a man any more, rather as a spirit-force vigorously driving a spirit-machine through the cloudy wastes of a floating universe. She realised herself as wholly at his mercy, and wondered to what amazing planet he would eventually conduct her.

Then, after a long, long period of semi-conscious musing and conjecture, she felt the sun upon her once more and, looking downwards from a height undreamed of, she saw the sea stretched like a pavement of marvellous blue and green and purple far below.

It was but a fleeting glimpse. In a moment the clouds had closed upon the vision, and she wondered if it could have been a dream, or if that sea really belonged to another unknown world that they were passing on their way.

The next time she could see anything with clearness the magic carpet was spread beneath them again, and something within her awoke at the sight and leapt with delight. She had an ardent longing to descend—to break from her dream and tread the earth once more.

And presently, very thankfully, she realised that her wish was about to be gratified. They were descending.

The roar of the engine filled her ears as in wonderful spirals they circled downwards. She saw the trees of a wood spring in a few moments from mere groundwork to decided features of a landscape that shone with a vernal brightness that seemed somehow to pierce her heart. Exquisite park-lands extended beyond the wood, threaded by a gleaming ribbon of river. As the earth swooped upwards to meet them she had an absurd desire to burst into tears of relief and joy. It had been a marvellous experience, but she was thankful—oh, she was thankful!—it was over.

The end of the flight came very swiftly, but without shock. They landed upon grass, ran a little way through a meadow of exquisite flowers, and then stood still.

Temple turned round to her at last. "Have you enjoyed it?" he said.

She tried to laugh in answer, but somehow she could not. She seemed to be falling through endless cloud-chasms into a nothingness that was annihilation.

She flung out her hands, wildly clinging to him. "Hold me—hold me!" she gasped.

He lifted her from her seat and made her sit upon the grass. He unbuckled her helmet and took it from her head. Then, still supporting her, he removed his own. His eyes looked into hers, and she realised sharply that he was tangible flesh and blood.

"Has it been too much for you?" he said, and felt in his pocket. "I say, don't faint!"

He brought out a flask, and poured brandy into a silver cup which he held against her lips.

She tried to refuse, but he would take no refusal. "You look half dead," he said.

So, reluctantly, she drank, sitting in the shadow of the machine that stood over them like an immense gadfly, and gradually her strength returned. She found herself able to laugh once more.

"I didn't know you were going to take me all round the universe," she said.

He laughed also, and finished the draught she put aside. "Good, wasn't it? We've been up nearly four hours. I could have done it in half the time, but the weather wasn't over-favourable. I had to do some tacking to keep out of those infernal storms. You're better now, are you? Have a cigarette!"

But Hope preferred to sit passive for a space and recover herself. She slipped off the leather coat and lay back upon it luxuriously.

"Do you know I thought we were over the sea once?" she said presently. "I suppose that was an optical delusion."

He gave her a sidelong glance. "The sea is not very far away," he said.

She turned towards him. "Where are we, then? And why did you come down here instead of going back to the starting-place?"

He tipped the ash from his cigarette. "I never meant to go back to the starting-place," he said. "Did you?"

She opened her eyes wide. "What do you mean? Of course I've got to get back! Why, I'm dining at Lady Burnley's to-night."

"By royal command?" said Temple, faintly sneering.

She nodded. "Something like that. I can't fail to turn up—anyway, without a decent excuse."

"Why not?" said Temple. "I can."

She looked at him in momentary bewilderment. "Oh, are you going too?"

"No," he said deliberately. "I am not going."

Hope gasped a little. "I couldn't very well treat her like that," she said, after a moment. "You see, they are friends of—of Chester's—at least Lord Burnley is."

"Does that matter?" said Temple lazily.

"Of course it does!" She felt herself flush unaccountably under his look. "I can't throw over—Chester's friends—like that."

"Sorry!" said Temple imperturbably. "I can't follow your line of argument. Frankly, I don't see what Chester has to do with it—especially as he is away. And for the rest—if I can give up a social engagement at short notice—I don't see why you can't."

She stared at him for a few seconds longer, and finally decided that he was trifling. She abandoned the discussion and turned her face up to the sunshine.

"What you do and what I do are two very different things," she remarked.

"Not on this occasion," said Temple.

He got up with the words and went to examine his engine, leaving her alone.

She felt too tired and too comfortable for any very connected thought. The crowded impressions of the past few hours seemed to have exhausted her brain. She did not want to think.

She was in fact on the verge of falling asleep when Temple came back to her. "I say," he said, "you must have something to eat before you go to sleep. Everything is all right. Come along to the house!"

She looked at him in a dazed fashion. "I'm very comfortable here," she said. "And we really must be getting back as soon as we have had a rest."

He smiled and bent to help her to her feet. "We'll talk about that after lunch," he said. "We must have a feed—whatever happens."

She was not aware of the necessity, but she yielded to his insistence. She got up and looked about her. "Where are we? What is this place?"

"It belongs to a friend of mine," he said easily. "He is away just now, but we can get something to eat."

"A private house?" she asked, catching sight of a grey turret rising among trees.

"Yes, a private house," he said.

They began to walk towards it up a grassy slope, leaving the parklands behind.

"What a nice place!" said Hope.

It gleamed in the full sunshine, grey, ancient, with mullioned windows that looked upon a wide terrace and a wonderful symmetrical garden of statues and cut yews.

"It looks—French," she said.

"Does it?" said Temple.

He took out another cigarette, and lighted it as he walked. He was evidently not in a talkative mood. She concluded that he also had felt the strain of that long flight.

They came to the primly beautiful garden. There was a fountain in the centre that fell, softly splashing, into a marble basin. The water spouted from a pitcher held by a nymph. Hope paused to look, "What a lovely thing!" she said.

And then her eyes went beyond, to the old house standing above the terrace.

"It's just like an old French château," she said.

"Is it?" said Temple indifferently.

They passed on, and mounted a flight of steps to the terrace. A further shorter flight led up to an open glass door. Hope paused again and glanced at her companion. "It's a sort of Sleeping Beauty palace," she said. "I'm afraid to go in."

He threw away his cigarette and took her by the arm. "You needn't be," he said. "There's only one beauty here, and she is not asleep—at present."

They entered a wonderful room with a high painted ceiling and marvellous tapestries. The furniture was all gilded and upholstered in an exquisite soft blue. In an inlaid cabinet there was some beautiful Sévres china. On the polished oak floor were priceless Persian rugs.

The place was dim, for the windows were shaded by sunblinds. A curious doubt suddenly stabbed Hope; it was almost a feeling of insecurity.

She faced her companion. "Major Temple, what is this place? Where is it? I want to know."

He looked at her, faintly smiling. "I'll show it you on the map presently. It isn't bewitched or anything of that kind. It's just a place to be happy in."

His manner did not satisfy her. She still stood looking at him doubtfully. "What does that mean?" she said.

His smile deepened and became subtly triumphant. "Don't look like that!" he said. "I haven't done anything—except bring you to the Palace of Desire. You can't say you are sorry you came."

"The Palace of Desire!" she echoed the words with a sinking sensation at her heart. "What can you mean?" she said slowly. "What can you mean?"

He moved, laid a reassuring hand upon her shoulder. "Look here! It's all right. Let me tell you afterwards! We are both of us wanting lunch pretty badly just now."

He tried very gently to impel her to the tall painted door that led into the interior of the house, but she resisted him. She had turned white to the lips.

"Tell me now, please!" she said.

He looked stubborn for a moment, then his expression changed. Into his eyes there came again the look that had startled her earlier in the day. He bent towards her, his hand closing upon hers. He spoke, his voice very low, but vibrant with an insistence that held her almost in spite of herself.

"It means just this," he said. "You and I have waited long enough. Now the real thing has come to us and we are going to take it—and keep it. This place is going to be our Garden of Eden, and here you shall love and be loved till the rest of the world outside realises that we belong to each other. You needn't be frightened, my darling." He was drawing her nearer to him though she stood as white and still as one of the marble statues below the terrace. "It's all right. There won't be any scandal to face over her. We're in France, and in France people have the sense to please themselves without consulting anyone else."

"In France!" Her white lips spoke the words though they did not seem to move. She was staring up at him with something that was very near akin to horror in her eyes.

"Even so! France!" His other hand came forth and closed upon her. He laughed at her softly. "You didn't realise that we crossed the Channel this morning—on our honeymoon—did you? Wasn't it neatly done, my Hope? I caught you—caged you—without your knowing. Don't you think I deserve—some reward—for my pains?"

His face was bent, seeking hers. In another moment his



lips would have found her own. But she started back from him suddenly and violently, forcing herself out of their reach.

"You deserve to be shot!" she cried out wildly. "How could you—how dared you—do this thing? How could you—imagine—even for an instant—even for an instant—that I—cared for you?"

The blow fell straight. He flinched, but only for a moment. The next he was holding her clenched hands by main force. The laughter had gone from his face. It was fixed and stern and as colourless as her own.

"You don't know what you are saying," he said. "Perhaps I've been a bit sudden and taken you by surprise. But you can't say—you can't pretend to me—that you've been—merely—trifling with me—all this time!"

"Haven't you trifled?" she flung back fiercely.

"No. I've been serious." Swift and emphatic came his answer. "I've been in earnest all through. I've loved you. And I've done more to win you than the man you call your husband, who loves you about as tenderly as he loves his domestic hearth and home comforts."

She winced at the words as though they cut her unbearably. She turned her face as if she could not endure to meet his eyes. "I'll—never forgive you!" she said in a choked voice.

"I don't want to be forgiven," he returned curtly. "I've had ample justification for all I've done—and for all I'm going to do."

She turned at that, turned with a sharp and furious movement, and wrenched her hands free. "How dare you say that? What do you mean by it? You have—no justification whatever—for behaving like a cad—and a coward! You—you picture yourself as invincible—and imagine every woman you meet is in love with you—ready to give up all she has for your sake. For yours!" She broke off on a note of scorn, breathing fast and hard, but defying him—defying him superbly—with every inch of her strength.

He stood quite motionless in front of her, his eyes fixed upon hers with a tension that made itself felt like the slow approach of some unknown and irresistible force, gradually overtopping her anger, overwhelming her spirit.

Not till she had been silent for several panting seconds did

he speak. Then very quietly, with pitiless intention, he rent away her defences, "If you feel like that about it," he said, "it's a pity you took the leap. But having taken it I'm afraid you haven't much choice left. You put yourself unreservedly in my hands, didn't you? You practically gave yourself into my keeping. And possession is nine points of the law."

"No!" she whispered. "No!"

But she could not take her eyes from his. She was held by a relentless strength of mastery against which she was powerless.

He went on. "You knew perfectly well that I loved you. I have seen the knowledge in your eyes. You never tried to stop me, or allowed me to think that it was in any way unwelcome to you. You played with me—because you liked the game. And now that you are beaten—do you think you can refuse to pay?"

She went back a step, and gripped the gilded back of a chair, clinging desperately, but still her eyes never left his. They saw nothing else. He waited for her to speak, and after a moment she forced some words through lips that were strangely dry and stiff. "You—you have cheated! You haven't beaten me—fairly!"

He made a scoffing sound, yet something told her that the thrust had gone home, and the knowledge renewed her failing strength. She straightened herself, still holding the chair.

"Well?" he said, almost as if commanding her to explain this unexpected revival of resistance.

She seemed to see a chance of escape, and braced herself to press for it. "You may have thought I was in earnest. I don't know. But you certainly weren't sure, or you wouldn't—you couldn't—have tricked me—like this. You would have asked me first. And I—and I—should have—refused."

"Oh, yes, I know," he said. "I foresaw that. You would never have faced it. You'd have been afraid."

"No—no!" Painfully she contradicted him. "I wouldn't have been afraid. Things like that—don't frighten me. If I had cared—if I had really cared—I should have been—bad enough—selfish enough—to give up everything—for love. I am like that." She made a little movement of one hand that

was somehow piteous. "I am not—good—like Hilda. I wouldn't have thought—twice about it—if I had cared. But—not caring—makes a difference. You say—because I am at your mercy—that possession is nine points of the law. And so it may be—so it is. But—there is a tenth point. I don't know if I can make you see it. It is—honour."

Again she knew that the thrust had pierced him. He stood so rigid; his hands were clenched at his sides.

"Do you consider you have treated me honourably!" he said.

She shook her head. "No, I am not talking about myself. I have told you I am not—good. I am the most selfish person alive—unless I love someone very much. Then—sometimes—I can forget—self. Not always—even then. But this doesn't rest just between us two. I think you forgot that, didn't you? Your honour may not be so very important—and mine scarcely counts at all. But that isn't everything, is it? There is—Chester to be considered. And he—he values his honour."

Temple uttered a short sound of impatience. "Oh, Chester is to be considered, is he? Very well, by all means let us consider him! How much does he care for you? How much is he ever likely to care? He has married you and given you a home. There, apparently, in his opinion, his obligations cease. I am prepared to do that too, but I shall do much more than that. I shall make you my wife. I shall share all I have with you down to life itself. What does he care for you? What has he ever really cared? Why, you know quite well in your heart that he will set you free with the greatest pleasure in the world. And—Hope—I will marry you and teach you what love can be!"

A great throb of passion suddenly sounded in his voice, and she quivered sharply as it reached her, as if he had forcibly rent away the last remaining obstacle between them. For a second or two, she stood, still facing him, strung to command herself, striving to find an answer. Then with a wild movement of abandonment she dropped forward over the chair that had been her support, and broke into an agony of tears.

Temple stood for a few moments staring at her, so unexpected and so complete had been her collapse. Then, as the awful storm shook her with a violence that seemed to end her very soul, he moved, went to her, lifted her up.

"Hope—child! For heaven's sake!" he said.

She did not resist him any longer. She was beyond it. But her distress was terrible, more anguished than anything he had ever beheld. She hung upon him, powerless, torn by convulsive sobbing. And to Meredith Temple, who had ever, till that moment, regarded the world as a pleasure-ground and all that it contained as his for the taking, there came a most unaccustomed feeling of doubt that almost amounted to compunction. He had not dreamed that any woman could ever weep like this. And for what was she weeping? For what?

He held her till the dreadful tempest had somewhat spent itself, then he put her down into the chair and waited beside her in a difficult silence. To feel at a loss in a woman's presence was a new experience with him.

She grew gradually calmer, but it was the calmness of exhaustion rather than relief. In the end she spoke to him, miserably, her head still bowed, her hands tightly clasped before her.

"I can't tell you—how much Chester cares for me, because I don't know—I never have known. I know he cares—a great deal—about honour. He married me—just to save mine. You wouldn't have married me for that."

Temple stirred uneasily. He was in the presence of a tragedy so alive with suffering that he shrank instinctively from looking upon it. His passion had sunk away. The tumult of her emotion had in a curious sense subdued him. He looked upon her with a strange species of reverence.

"I am afraid I don't understand," he said.

"I will tell you," she said, in the same low, broken voice. "It may be true—in one way—that it would give him pleasure to set me free. I don't know him well enough to judge. I only know that I would rather die—than give him—that sort of opportunity. Because he saved me—he saved me—when he might have let me go under—when, but for him—I must have gone under. It's happened to heaps of women before me—just awful stark necessity—forcing them down. But he—he came just in time. And he saved me. Would you have saved me, I wonder? Would you have offered me marriage—then—when you could—so easily—have had me without?" She paused a moment. Then painfully continued: "No, don't answer! I don't really want you to

answer. It doesn't matter, does it, what you would have done? It was Chester who had the chance—and he took it—out of the goodness of his soul. And that is why the tenth point is his. That is why I have got to be true to him—or die.”

She ceased, and there fell a silence between them that stretched on and on interminably—a silence bitter with despair—till at length the man, pushed by some impulse he did not pause to examine, brought it to an abrupt end.

“Well—you’ve won your tenth point,” he said. “I’ve no answer to that.”

She looked up at him, half startled by his utterance. “How you must despise me!” she said.

“No, I don’t.” His eyes met hers, and she read with wonder the unwonted reverence there. “I think you’re quite impossible—but rather fine. Look here, Hope!” He held out his hand to her abruptly. “Will you forgive me? Will you trust me again?”

She gave him her hand instantly, without speaking—though she wondered.

“Thanks,” he said, as if momentarily embarrassed; then, awkwardly, almost boyishly, “Hope—I say—don’t ever cry like that again! The man isn’t living who is worth it.”

She flushed and her face quivered rather piteously, but she managed to achieve a difficult smile. “All right,” she said.

He squeezed her hand and let it go. “The next thing is to get back without being found out,” he said, and it came to her with the word that—perhaps for the first time in his life—he was subordinating his own desires to those of another.

It touched her very strangely. She got up. “Oh, don’t bother about that!” she said. “I shall manage.”

He looked at her with a curious smile. “That’s very generous of you,” he said. “But since I got you into this mess, it’s up to me to get you out again. You’ll scarcely believe it, but—I have some sense of honour and moral obligation. The mistake was mine.”

Her lip was trembling. “And mine!” she said.

He shook his head. “No. You were not accessory.” He looked at his watch. “If I can get hold of a car, I can motor you to Boulogne to catch the afternoon boat. It will be quick work, but it can be done.”

“Oh, thank you!” she said very earnestly.

He looked at her oddly. "Do that later—when you've had time to think out how much you have to thank me for!" He turned as if to go, then wheeled suddenly back. "Just one thing!" he said, and paused, standing, hesitating, ir-resolute.

"What is it?" she said.

He moved close to her. "Hope, I had the chance to kiss you—and I didn't. Put that one thing—to my credit—when you come to reckon up the account!"

His voice was very low. It held a nameless something that went straight to her heart. Impulsively she reached out to him and took him by the shoulders. She did not utter a single word, but she kissed him. And he kissed her, holding her closely for a moment ere—very swiftly—he turned and left her.

It was past seven o'clock that evening when Hope came back to the house in the square that she had left with so light a heart more than twelve hours before. The splendid promise of the day had turned to rain, and a dull mist hung upon all things. She was very, very tired.

She ascended to the flat on the third floor that was her home, and entered with a lagging step. Her maid came to meet her, looking startled and expectant. Had she forgotten that she was to dine at Lady Burnley's? What frock would she wear? Then, catching a full view of her face, she changed her enquiries with nervous haste, and asked if she should bring her tea.

"Yes," Hope said. "And light a fire. I'm very tired. I don't think I can go out to-night."

She turned towards the little drawing-room but hesitated suddenly on the threshold. "Is there someone here?"

A whiff of tobacco-smoke had come to her. She looked sharply at the girl behind her, who turned scarlet.

"He said I wasn't to tell you," she whispered.

Hope's hand went to her heart. She was white to the lips. A moment she stood as if struck powerless, then with a jerky movement she opened the door and entered.

A square figure, not over tall, rose up from an armchair at her coming.

"Hullo, my dear!" a quiet voice said.

She went forward almost mechanically. He met her with hands outstretched that gripped hers in a close, kind grip. He pulled her to him and kissed her.

"Why, you're cold!" he said.

She was shivering from head to foot. "You—you—Chester—when did you get here?" she said, forcing her voice through lips that seemed frozen stiff.

He drew her to the chair he had just vacated. "Hours ago," he said. "Sit down! You must have some wine. You are chilled to the bone."

He rang and gave the order, then knelt himself and kindled the fire.

She lay back in her chair and watched him as if in a dream. Broad and strong, with bristling hair that had once been sandy and was now quite colourless, and shaggy fair eyebrows through which the blue eyes shone with absolute directness, such was Chester Davenant; a man to know and trust at sight, but not a man to trifle with.

He settled the fire to his satisfaction, and turned round to her. He grasped the chair in which she sat, and pulled it forward to the blaze.

"Well, my dear, how are you?" he said.

The servant entered with wine, and he got up and took it from her and carried it to Hope's side.

"You didn't expect to find me here, did you?" he said, as he poured it out. "Was it a great shock?"

She tried to smile; but suddenly her lips quivered, and she turned sharply away.

He held the wine down in front of her. "Drink some!" he said. "You are tired."

Her hand was trembling as she took the glass; he guided it to her lips.

She drank a little and paused. "I am—so glad—you're home," she said, uttering the words with difficulty.

He patted her shoulder. "Thank you, my dear. Finish that stuff before you say any more! It will do you good."

She obeyed him, and was thankful to feel the blood begin to course once more in her veins. She regained her self-control, and looked up at him. "Chester, I'm so sorry I was out. I'd have stayed at home if I'd known."

His eyes shone straight down into hers. They had a peculiar brightness that almost dazzled her. "That's all

right, my dear," he said. "I knew you would be back before long."

She sat up slowly. "I must ring up Lady Burnley and tell her that I can't dine to-night."

He put out a restraining hand. "You needn't. She isn't expecting you."

"Not expecting me!" Hope stared at him. "But Chester, she is!"

"No, she isn't!" He corrected her gently. "I rang her up myself half an hour ago and told her you wouldn't leave me. It's all right, dear. She quite understands."

He turned aside to poke the fire. Hope leaned forward in her chair, and watched him, feeling oddly breathless and disconcerted. He had never done anything so baffling before.

After a pause he turned round again. "Take that cap thing off!" he said. "I can't see you properly."

She obeyed him, and her dark hair, loosened, clustered softly about her face. He stood looking down at her and she waited, her heart throbbing fast and hard. He spoke at length. "Hope, I'm afraid there's another shock in store for you. I've got another job. I'm home for good."

"Oh, Chester!" She started and looked up at him, meeting his eyes.

He held out his hands to her, and in a moment she was on her feet, had sprung to him, and was clinging to them like a lost child.

"I'm very glad—oh, very glad!" she told him rather incoherently.

He drew her close to him, looking into her face. "Have you been very lonely?" he asked.

Her lips were quivering. She tried to avoid his look. "A little—sometimes," she murmured.

He still looked at her very steadily. "I have been hearing—wonderful things about you, Hope," he said.

She glanced up at him nervously. "Who from? Hilda?" "Hilda and others." His voice was absolutely steady; it told her nothing. Was he taking her to task? Was he deliberately testing her?

She braced herself, though she had begun to tremble. "What things?" she said.

"Do you really want to know?" he said.

She nodded. "Of course I do."



His hands gripped hers. "I have been hearing," he said "that my wife is a tremendous favourite everywhere, that she is so much in demand that she had to start at half-past six in the morning to keep pace with it, that—yes, what is it?"

She had started in his hold as if something had pierced her. He knew, then—he knew!

She looked at him with something very like terror in her eyes. "Who told you—that?" she said.

"Lady Burnley told me that—on the 'phone—half an hour ago." He answered her clearly, concisely, as if he were making a report.

"Ah!" She was openly shrinking from him now. The steady gaze of those keen eyes was torture to her.

"What—else—did she tell you?" she said in a whisper.

"Not much. It was my turn then. I told her exactly what you were doing and where you were." The words came briefly, they had a clipped sound. But still there was no anger in the eyes that looked into hers, nor did they hold contempt.

Yet she straightened herself as if to meet a blow. "You told her what?"

Her voice sounded harsh even to herself, but she flinched no longer. She faced him with unswerving courage.

And into the man's eyes there flashed a sudden warmth that was like the kindling of a flame. He drew her suddenly to him, holding her rigid hands against his breast.

"I told her," he said, "that you got up early to meet me—that you had been with me—all day long."

"Chester!" She caught her breath with a sharp effort, but in a moment she had herself in hand. She would not flinch again. She stood and faced him.

"Why did you tell her that?" she said.

He was looking her closely in the eyes; he was forcing the doors of her soul. "Because I knew you were coming back," he told her doggedly. "Because I was not afraid to stake my honour on yours."

She resisted him for a moment, holding the doors against him. "Chester, wait! Honour may be everything to you? It isn't—always—to me. What if I had failed you? What if I had not come back? What then?"

"What then?" He repeated the words with an inflection, and though he still held her with the deliberate mastery of

possession, she was aware of a change in him—a curious weakening where she had expected the most merciless strength. It thrilled her strangely. She felt that suddenly and unaccountably the tide of battle had turned.

"Wouldn't you have set me free?" she said, and her words came quick and passionate. "Tell me the truth! Wouldn't you—gladly—have set me free?"

He looked at her with eyes that saw beyond her fiery beauty. She had withstood him for a space, but she could not thrust him out.

"Yes," he said, after a moment, and with the words he smiled—a very strange smile. "I should certainly have set you free."

"Ah!" It was almost a cry of pain. She drew back from him, but he held her still.

"Wait!" he said. "Possession is nine points of the law, remember! You are not free—yet."

"Oh, don't—don't!" She bowed her head suddenly, hiding her face from him. "Don't remind me of that!"

"Of what?" he said.

"Of—of the tenth point." She choked back a sob. After all, he had conquered her, she knew not how. His mastery seemed to encompass her whichever way she turned.

He put his arm around her, steadying her. "And what is the tenth point?" he said. "Just your sense of duty towards me, is it? You needn't be afraid to tell me, little girl. I'm used to hard knocks. And I'd rather know the truth." Then, sinking his voice lower, as she did not speak: "I haven't done much to make you happy. But—if you want to be quit of me—I can do that." Again he paused a moment, then went on very steadily. "You know, I've always had a rotten sort of feeling that you were rather forced into marrying me, and for that reason I could never hold you against your will. There has got to be fair play between us. That is the tenth point for me—the only point that matters. I've kept out of your way so far. I wanted you to have your share of good things and not feel that you had been hopelessly handicapped and cheated of the best. Hilda says I've done wrong. But then we all know what Hilda is. She is no impartial judge."

"Hilda is quite right!" The words flashed out at him suddenly like a challenge. She had lifted her face again, and

her eyes blazed like stars out of its deep shadows. "Hilda knows what the best is—better than anyone else. Oh, I don't know why I should tell you. If—if—you hadn't been—generous enough to believe in me, I couldn't. But I will now—so that—so that you can go away again and feel quite safe. There's only one thing in the world that has kept me true to you—or that ever can. And it isn't really honour—or duty, or anything to do with the law. It isn't gratitude even." Her voice shook. "It's love—just love—that brought me back to-night—though I didn't know you were here! I love you, I've always loved you—though I know I'm a fool to do it!" She forced back another sob. "It's like the needle and the magnet. I didn't come back for any reason at all—except that I had to. I love you so."

She broke off, quivering. She had flung wide the doors to him at last. She had shown him her inner soul—waiting for his coming. With superb self-surrender she offered him all that she had—and waited!

And Chester Davenant entered in immediately and took possession as surely and as steadily as he did all things. But he showed neither elation nor triumph over his victory. There was even a species of old-world chivalry about him as he accepted that splendid surrender, taking her closely in his arms, and holding her so that she felt the strong beating of his heart against her own, reassuring her.

"Sweetheart," he said, "you give me courage. It is just that very thing that I've come from the ends of the earth to say to you. I've found out that life—without Hope—isn't worth having. So you mustn't ask me to go away again—for it can't be done."

He would have kissed her trembling lips with the words, but she held back from him for a moment, claiming her woman's privilege.

"And yet you would have set me free," she said.

She saw again the smile which before had puzzled her. The eyes that looked into hers were infinitely kind, but they held more than kindness—something that stirred her to the depths.

"My dear, if you had really wanted your freedom," he said. "I shouldn't have found it very difficult—in spite of the nine points—just to go overboard on a dark night for your dear sake."

She cried out sharply at the words and clasped him passionately close. "Oh, no—not that—not that! Chester, you don't mean—that!"

He kissed her very tenderly upon the lips, silencing her. But he did not contradict her.

"Thank God you came back, dear!" he said simply. "It's only the tenth point that matters after all. It will hold us together for the rest of our lives."



## A. E. COPPARD

### *The Higglers*

A. E. Coppard, short story writer and poet, established his literary reputation with the publication of *Adam and Eve and Pinch Me* in 1921, since when he has written nearly twenty books. *Fishmonger's Fiddle* and *Dunkey Fitlow* are probably the best known.



## THE HIGGLER

### I

ON a cold April afternoon a higgler was driving across Shag Moor in a two-wheeled cart.

H. WITLOW  
Dealer in Poultry  
DINNOP

was painted on the hood ; the horse was of mean appearance but notorious ancestry. A high upland common was this moor, two miles from end to end, and full of furze and bracken. There were no trees and not a house, nothing but a line of telegraph poles following the road, sweeping with rigidity from north to south ; nailed upon one of them a small scarlet notice to stonethrowers was prominent as a wound. On so high and wide a region as Shag Moor the wind always blew, or if it did not quite blow there was a cool activity in the air. The furze was always green and growing, and, taking no account of seasons, often golden. Here in summer solitude lounged and snoozed ; at other times, as now, it shivered and looked sinister.

Higglers in general are ugly and shrewd, old and hard, crafty and callous, but Harvey Witlow, though shrewd, was not ugly ; he was hard but not old, crafty but not at all unkind. If you had eggs to sell he would buy them, by the score he would, or by the long hundred. Other odds and ends he would buy or do, paying good bright silver, bartering a bag of apples, carrying your little pig to market, or fetching a tree from the nurseries. But the season was backward, eggs were scarce, trade was bad—by crumps, it was indeed !—and as he crossed the moor Harvey could not help discussing the situation with himself. “ If things don’t change, and change for the better, and change soon, I can’t last,



and I can't endure it ; I'll be damned and done, and I'll have to sell," he said, prodding the animal with the butt of his whip, "this cob. And," he said, as if in afterthought, prodding the footboard, "this cart, and go back to the land. And I'll have lost my fifty pounds. Well, that's what war does for you. It does it for you, sir," he announced sharply to the vacant moor, "and it does it for me. Fifty pounds ! I was better off in the war. I was better off working for farmers—much. But it's no good chattering about it, it's the trick of life ; when you get so far, then you can go and order your funeral. Get along, Dodger ! ”

The horse responded briskly for a few moments, "I tell ye," said Harvey, adjuring the ambient air, "you can go and order your funeral. Get along, Dodger ! ”

Again Dodger got along.

"Then there's Sophy, what about Sophy and me ? ”

He was not engaged to Sophy Daws, not exactly, but he was keeping company with her. He was not pledged or affianced, he was just keeping company with her. But Sophy, as he knew, not only desired a marriage with Mr. Witlow, she expected it, and expected it soon. So did her parents, her friends, and everybody in the village, including the postman who didn't live in it but wished he did, and the parson who did live in it but wished he didn't.

"Well, that's damned and done, fair damned and done now, unless things take a turn, and soon, so it's no good chattering about it."

And just then and there things did take a turn. He had never been across the moor before ; he was prospecting for trade. At the end of Shag Moor he saw standing back on the common, fifty yards from the road, a neat square house set in a little farm. Twenty acres, perhaps. The house was girded by some white palings ; beside it was a snug orchard in a hedge covered with blackthorn bloom. It was very green and pleasant in front of the house. The turf was cleared and closely cropped, some ewes were grazing and under the blackthorn, out of the wind, lay half a dozen lambs, but what chiefly moved the imagination of Harvey Witlow was a field on the far side of the house. It had a small rickyard with a few small stacks in it ; everything here seemed on the small scale, but snug, very snug ; and in that field and yard were hundreds of fowls, hundreds, of good breed,

and mostly white. Leaving his horse to sniff the greensward, the higgler entered a white wicket gateway and passed to the back of the house, noting as he did so a yellow wagon inscribed "Elizabeth Sadgrove. Prattle Corner."

At the kitchen door he was confronted by a tall gaunt woman of middle age with a teapot in her hands.

"Afternoon, ma'am. Have you anything to sell?" began Harvey Witlow, tilting his hat with a confident affable air. The tall woman was cleanly dressed, a superior person; her hair was grey. She gazed at him.

"It's cold," he continued. She looked at him as uncomprehendingly as a mouse might look at a gravestone.

"I'll buy any mortal thing, ma'am. Except trouble; I'm full up wi' that already. Eggs? Fowls?"

"I've not seen you before," commented Mrs. Sadgrove a little bleakly, in a deep husky voice.

"No, 'tis the first time as ever I drove in this part. To tell you the truth, ma'am, I'm new to the business. Six months. I was in the war a year ago. Now I'm trying to knock up a connection. Difficult work. Things are very quiet."

Mrs. Sadgrove silently removed the lid of the teapot, inspected the interior of the pot with an intent glance, and then replaced the lid as if she had seen a blackbeetle there.

"Ah, well," sighed the higgler. "You've a neat little farm here, ma'am."

"It's quite enough," said she.

"Sure it is, ma'am. Very lonely."

"And it's difficult work, too," Mrs. Sadgrove almost smiled.

"Sure it is, ma'am; but you does it well, I can see. Oh, you've some nice little ricks of corn, eh! I does well enough at the dealing now and again, but it's teasy work, and mostly I don't earn enough to keep my horse in shoe leather."

"I've a few eggs, perhaps," said she.

"I could do with a score or two, ma'am, if you could let me have 'em."

"You'll have to come all my way if I do."

"Name your own price, ma'am, if you don't mind trading with me."

"Mind! Your money's as good as my own, isn't it?"

"It must be, ma'am. That's meaning no disrespects to

you," the young higgler assured her hastily, and was thereupon invited to enter the kitchen.

A stone floor with two or three mats; open hearth with burning logs; a big dresser painted brown, carrying a row of white cups on brass hooks and shelves of plates overlapping each other like the scales of a fish. A dark settle half hid a flight of stairs with a small gate at the top. Under the window a black sofa, deeply indented, invited you a little repellingly, and in the middle of the room stood a large table, exquisitely scrubbed, with one end of it laid for tea. Evidently a living-room as well as kitchen. A girl, making toast at the fire, turned as the higgler entered. Beautiful she was: red hair, a complexion like the inside of a nut, blue eyes, and the hands of a lady. He saw it all at once, jacket of bright green wool, black dress, grey stockings and shoes, and forgot his errand, her mother, his fifty pounds, Sophy—momentarily he forgot everything. The girl stared strangely at him. He was tall, cleanshaven, with a loop of black hair curling handsomely over one side of his brow.

"Good afternoon," said Harvey Witlow, as softly as if he had entered a church.

"Some eggs, Mary," Mrs. Sadgrove explained. The girl laid down her toasting-fork. She was less tall than her mother, whom she resembled only enough for the relationship to be noted. Silently she crossed the kitchen and opened a door that led into a dairy. Two pans of milk were creaming on a bench there, and on the flags were two great baskets filled with eggs.

"How many are there?" asked Mrs. Sadgrove, and the girl replied: "Fifteen score, I think."

"Take the lot, higgler?"

"Yes, ma'am," he cried eagerly, and ran out to his cart and fetched a number of trays. In them he packed the eggs as the girl handed them to him from the baskets. Mrs. Sadgrove left them together. For a time the higgler was silent.

"No," at length he murmured, "I've never been this road before."

There was no reply from Mary. Sometimes their fingers touched, and often, as they bent over the eggs, her bright hair almost brushed his face.

"It is a loneish spot," he ventured again.

"Yes," said Mary Sadgrove.

When the eggs were all transferred her mother came in again.

"Would you buy a few pullets, higgler?"

"Any number, ma'am," he declared quickly. Any number; by crumps, the tide was turning! He followed the mother into the yard, and there again she left him, waiting. He mused about the girl and wondered about the trade. If they offered him ten thousand chicks he'd buy them, somehow, he would! She had stopped in the kitchen. Just in there she was, just behind him, a few feet away. Over the low wall of the yard a fat black pony was strolling in a field of bright greensward. In the yard, watching him, was a young gander, and on a stone saddle beside it lay a dead thrush on its back, its legs stiff in the air. The girl stayed in the kitchen; she was moving about, though, he could hear her; perhaps she was spying at him through the window. Twenty million eggs he would buy if Mrs. Sadgrove had got them. She was gone a long time. It was very quiet. The gander began to comb its white breast with its beak. Its three-toed feet were a most tender pink, shaped like wide diamonds, and at each of the three forward points there was a toe like a small blanched nut. It lifted one foot, folding the webs, and hid it under its wing and sank into a resigned meditation on one leg. It had a blue eye that was meek—it had two, but you could only see one at a time—a meek blue eye, set in a pink rim that gave it a dissolute air, and its beak had raw red nostrils as if it suffered from the damp. Altogether a beautiful bird. And in some absurd way it resembled Mrs. Sadgrove.

"Would you sell that young gollan, ma'am?" Harvey inquired when the mother returned.

Yes, she would sell him, and she also sold him two dozen pullets. Harvey packed the fowls in a crate.

"Come on," he cried, cuddling the squawking gander in his arms, "you needn't be afeared of me, I never kills anything afore Saturdays."

He roped it by its leg to a hook inside his cart. Then he took out his bag of money, paid Mrs. Sadgrove her dues, said "Good day, ma'am, good day," and drove off without seeing another sign or stitch of that fine young girl.

"Get along, Dodger, get along wi' you." They went bowling along for nearly an hour, and then he could see

the landmark on Dan'el Green's Hill, a windmill that never turned though it looked a fine competent piece of architecture, just beyond Dinnop.

Soon he reached his cottage and was chaffing his mother, a hearty buxom dame, who stayed at home and higgled with any chance callers. At this business she was perhaps more enlightened than her son. It was almost a misfortune to get into her clutches.

"How much you give for this?" he cried, eyeing with humorous contempt an object in a coop that was neither flesh nor rude red herring.

"Oh crumps," he declared, when she told him, "I am damned and done!"

"Go on with you, that's a good bird, I tell you, with a full heart, as will lay in a month."

"I doubt it's a hen at all," he protested. "Oh, what a ravenous beak! Damned and done I am."

Mrs. Witlow's voice began indignantly to rise.

"Oh well," mused her son, "it's thrifty perhaps. It ain't quite right, but it's not so wrong as to make a fuss about, especially as I be pretty sharp set. And if it's hens you want," he continued triumphantly, dropping the crate of huddled fowls before her, "there's hens for you; and a gander! There's a gander for you, if it's a gander you want."

Leaving them all in his cottage yard he went and stalled the horse and cart at the inn, for he had no stable of his own. After supper he told his mother about the Sadgroves of Prattle Corner. "Prettiest girl you ever seen, but the shyest mortal alive. Hair like a squirrel, lovely."

"An't you got to go over and see Sophy to-night?" inquired his mother, lighting the lamp.

"Oh, lord, if I ain't clean forgot that! Well, I'm tired, shan't go to-night. See her to-morrow."

## II

Mrs. Sadgrove had been a widow for ten years—and she was glad of it. Prattle Corner was her property, she owned it and farmed it with the aid of a little old man and a large lad. The older this old man grew, and the less wages he received (for Elizabeth Sadgrove was reputed a 'grinder'),

the more ardently he worked; the older the lad grew the less he laboured and the more he swore. She was thriving. She was worth money was Mrs. Sadgrove. Ah! And her daughter Mary, it was clear, had received an education fit for a lord's lady; she had been at a seminary for gentlefolk's females until she was seventeen. Well, whether or no, a clock must run as you time it; but it wronged her for the work of a farm, it spoiled her, it completely deranged her for the work of a farm; and this was a pity and foolish, because some day the farm was coming to her as didn't know hay from a bull's foot.

All this, and more, the young higgler quickly learned, and plenty more he soon divined. Business began to flourish with him now; his despair was gone, he was established, he could look forward, to whatever it was he wanted to look forward, with equanimity and such pleasurable anticipation as the chances and charges of life might engender. Every week, and twice a week, he would call at the farm, and though these occasions had their superior business inducements they often borrowed a less formal tone and intention.

"Take a cup of tea, higgler?" Mrs. Sadgrove would abruptly invite him; and he would drink tea and discourse with her for half an hour on barndoor ornithology, on harness, and markets, the treatment of swine, the wear and tear of gear. Mary always present, was always silent, seldom uttering a word to the higgler; yet a certain grace emanated from her to him, an interest, a light, a favour, circumscribed indeed by some modesty, shyness, some inhibition, that neither of them had the wit or the opportunity to overcome.

One evening he pulled up at the white palings of Prattle Corner. It was a calm evening in May, the sun was on its down-going, chaffinches and wrens sung ceaselessly. Mary in the orchard was heavily veiled; he could see her over the hedge, holding a brush in her gloved hands, and a bee skep. A swarm was clustered like a great gnarl on the limb of an apple tree. Bloom was thickly covering the twigs. She made several timid attempts to brush the bees into the skep, but they resented this.

"They knows if you be afraid of 'em," bawled Harvey; "I better come and give you a hand."

When he took the skep and brush from her she stood like one helpless, released by fate from a task ill-understood and

gracelessly waived. But he liked her shyness, her almost uncouth immobility.

"Never mind about that," said Harvey, as she unfastened her veil, scattering the white petals that had collected upon it; "when they kicks they hurts, but I've been stung so often that I'm 'nocolated against 'em. They knows if you be afraid of 'em."

Wearing neither veil nor gloves he went confidently to the tree, and collected the swarm without mishap.

"Don't want to show no fear of them," said Harvey. "Nor of anything else, come to that," he added with a guffaw, "nor anybody."

At that she blushed and thanked him very softly, and she did look straight and clearly at him.

Never anything beyond a blush and a thank-you. When, in the kitchen or the parlour, Mrs. Sadgrove sometimes left them alone together Harvey would try a lot of talk, blarneying talk or sensible talk, or talk about events in the world that was neither the one nor the other. No good. The girl's responses were ever brief and confused. Why was this? Again and again he asked himself that question. Was there anything the matter with her? Nothing that you could see; she was a bright and beautiful being. And it was not contempt, either, for despite her fright, her voicelessness, her timid eyes, he divined her friendly feeling for himself; and he would discourse to his own mother about her and her mother:

"They are well-up people, you know, well off; plenty of money and nothing to do with it. The farm's their own, freehold. A whole row of cottages she's got, too, in Smoorton Comfrey, so I heard; good cottages, well let. She's worth a few thousands, I warrant. Mary's beautiful. I took a fancy to that girl the first moment I see her. But she's very highly cultivated—and, of course, there's Sophy."

To this enigmatic statement Mrs. Witlow offered no response, but mothers are inscrutable beings to their sons always.

Once he bought some trees of cherries from Mrs. Sadgrove, and went on a July morning to pick the fruit. Under the trees Mary was walking slowly to and fro, twirling a clapper to scare away the birds. He stood watching her from the gateway. Among the bejewelled trees she passed, turning the rattle with a listless air, as if beating time to a sad music that

only she could hear. The man knew that he was deeply fond of her. He passed into the orchard, bade her good-morning, And, lifting his ladder into one of the trees nearest the hedge, began to pluck cherries. Mary moved slimly in her white frock up and down a shady avenue in the orchard waving the clapper. The brightness of sun and sky was almost harsh; there was a little wind that feebly lifted the despondent leaves. He had doffed his coat; his shirt was white and clean. The lock of dark hair drooped over one side of his forehead; his face was brown and pleasant, his bare arms brown and powerful. From his high perch among the leaves Witlow watched for the girl to draw near to him in her perambulation. Knavish birds would scatter at her approach, only to drop again into the trees she had passed. His soul had an immensity of longing for her, but she never spoke a word to him. She would come from the shade of the little avenue, through the dumb trees that could only bend to greet her, into the sunlight whose dazzle gilded her own triumphant bloom. Fine! Fine! And always as she passed his mind refused to register a single thought he could offer her, or else his tongue would refuse to utter it. But his glance never left her face until she had passed out of sight again, and then he would lean against the ladder in the tree, staring down at the ground, seeing nothing or less than nothing, except a field mouse climbing to the top of a coventry bush in the hedge below him, nipping off one thick leaf and descending with the leaf in its mouth. Sometimes Mary rested at the other end of the avenue; the clapper would be silent and she would not appear for—oh, hours! She never rested near the trees Witlow was denuding. The mouse went on ascending and descending, and Witlow filled his basket, and shifted his stand, and wondered.

At noon he got down and sat on the hedge bank to eat a snack of lunch. Mary had gone indoors for hers, and he was alone for awhile. Capriciously enough, his thoughts dwelt upon Sophy Daws. Sophy was a fine girl, too; not such a lady as Mary Sadgrove—oh lord, no! her father was a gamekeeper!—but she was jolly and ample. She had been a little capricious lately, said he was neglecting her. That wasn't true; hadn't he been busy? Besides, he wasn't bound to her in any sort of way, and of course he couldn't afford any marriage yet awhile. Sophy hadn't got any money,



never had any. What she did with her wages—she was a parlourmaid—was a teaser! Harvey grunted a little, and said "Well!" And that is all he said, and all he thought, about Sophy Daws, then, for he could hear Mary's clapper begin again in a corner of the orchard. He went back to his work. There at the foot of the tree were the baskets full of cherries, and those yet to be filled. "Phew, but that's hot!" commented the man, "I'm as dry as a rattle."

A few cherries had spilled from one basket and lay on the ground. The little furry mouse had found them and was industriously nibbling at one. The higgler nonchalantly stamped his foot upon it, and kept it so for a moment or two. Then he looked at the dead mouse. A tangle of entrails had gushed from its whiskered muzzle.

He resumed his work and the clapper rattled on throughout the afternoon, for there were other cherry trees that other buyers would come to strip in a day or two. At four o'clock he was finished. Never a word had he spoken with Mary, or she with him. When he went over to the house to pay Mrs. Sadgrove, Mary stopped in the orchard scaring the birds.

"Take a cup of tea, Mr. Witlow," said Mrs. Sadgrove; and then she surprisingly added, "Where's Mary?"

"Still a-frightening the birds, and pretty well tired of that, I should think, ma'am."

The mother had poured out three cups of tea.

"Shall I go and call her in?" he asked, rising.

"You might," said she.

In the orchard the clapping had ceased. He walked all round, and in among the trees, but saw no sign of Mary; nor on the common, nor in the yard. But when he went back to the house Mary was there already, chatting at the table with her mother. She did not greet him, though she ceased talking to her mother as he sat down. After drinking his tea he went off briskly to load the baskets in to the cart. As he climbed up to drive off Mrs. Sadgrove came out and stood beside the horse.

"You're off now?" said she.

"Yes, ma'am; all loaded, and thank you."

She glanced vaguely along the road he had to travel. The afternoon was as clear as wine, the greensward itself dazzled him; lonely Shag Moor stretched away, humped with sweet

yellow furze and pilastered with its telegraph poles. No life there, no life at all. Harvey sat on his driving board, musingly brushing the flank of his horse with the trailing whip.

"Ever round this way on Sundays?" inquired the woman, peering up at him.

"Well, not in a manner of speaking, I'm not, ma'am," he answered her.

The widow laid her hand on the horse's back, patting vaguely. The horse pricked up its ears, as if it were listening.

"If you are, at all, ever, you must look in and have a bit of dinner with us."

"I will, ma'am, I will."

"Next Sunday?" she went on.

"I will, ma'am, yes, I will," he repeated, "and thank you."

"One o'clock?" The widow smiled up at him.

"At one o'clock, ma'am; next Sunday; I will, and thank you," he said.

She stood away from the horse and waved her hand. The first tangible thought that floated mutely out of the higgler's mind as he drove away was: "I'm damned if I ain't a-going it, Sophy!"

He told his mother of Mrs. Sadgrove's invitation with an air of curbed triumph. "Come round—she says. Yes—I says—I'll. That's right—she says—so do."

### III

On the Sunday morn he dressed himself gallantly. It was again a sweet unclouded day. The church bell at Dinnop had begun to ring. From his window, as he fastened his most ornate tie, Harvey could observe his neighbour's two small children in the next garden, a boy and girl clad for church-going and each carrying a clerical book. The tiny boy placed his sister in front of a hen-roost and, opening his book, began to pace to and fro before her, shrilly intoning: "Jesus is the shepherd, ring the bell. Oh lord, ring the bell, am I a good boy? Amen. Oh lord, ring the bell." The little girl bowed her head piously over her book. The lad then picked up from the ground a dish which had contained the dog's food, and presented it momentarily before the lilac bush, the rabbit in a hutch, the axe fixed in a chopping

block, and then before his sister. Without lifting her peering gaze from her book she meekly dropped two pebbles in the plate, and the boy passed on, lightly moaning, to the clothes-line post and a cock scooping in some dust.

"Ah, the little impets!" cried Harvey Witlow. "Here, Toby! Here, Margaret!" He took two pennies from his pocket and lobbed them from the window to the astonished children. As they stooped to pick up the coins Harvey heard the hoarse voice of neighbour Nathan, their father, bawl from his kitchen: "Come on in, and shut that bloody door, d'y'ear!"

Harnessing his moody horse to the gig Harvey was soon bowling away to Shag Moor, and as he drove along he sung loudly. He had a pink rose in his buttonhole. Mrs. Sadgrove received him almost affably, and though Mary was more shy than ever before, Harvey had determined to make an impression. During the dinner he fired off his bucolic jokes, and pleasant tattle of a more respectful and sober nature; but after dinner Mary sat like Patience, not upon a monument, but as if upon a rocking-horse, shy and fearful, and her mother made no effort to inspire her as the higgler did, unsuccessful though he was. They went to the pens to look at the pigs, and as they leaned against the low walls and poked the maudlin inhabitants, Harvey began: "Reminds me, when I was in the war. . . ."

"Were you in the war?" interrupted Mrs. Sadgrove.

"Oh, yes, I was in that war, ah, and there was a pig. . . . Danger? Of lord, bless me, it was a bit dangerous, but you never knew where it was or what it 'ud be at next; it was like the sword of Damockels. There was a bullet once come 'ithin a foot of my head, and it went through a board an inch thick, slap through that board." Both women gazed at him apprehendingly. "Why, I might 'a been killed, you know," said Harvey, cocking his eye musingly at the weather-vane on the barn. "We was in billets at St. Gratien, and one day a chasseur came up—a French yoossar, you know—and he began talking to our sergeant. That was Hubert Luxter, the butcher: died a month or two ago of measles. But this yoossar couldn't speak English at all, and none of us chaps could make sense of him. I never could understand that lingo somehow, never; and though there was half a dozen of us chaps there, none of us were man enough for

it neither. 'Nil compree,' we says, 'non compos.' I told him straight: 'you ought to learn English,' I said, 'it's much easier than your kind of bally chatter.' So he kept shaping up as if he was holding a rifle, and then he'd say 'Fusee—bang!' and then he'd say 'cushion'—kept on saying 'cushion.' Then he gets a bit of chalk and draws on the wall something that looks like a horrible dog, and says, 'cushion' again."

"Pig," interjected Mary Sadgrove softly.

"Yes, yes!" ejaculated Harvey, "so t'was! Do you know any French lingo?"

"Oh, yes!" declared her mother, "Mary knows it very well."

"Ah," sighed the higgler, "I don't, although I been to France. And I couldn't do it now, not for luck nor love. You learnt it, I suppose. Well, this yoossar wants to borrow my rifle, but of course I can't lend him. So he taps on this horrible pig he'd drawn, and then he taps on his own head, and rolls his eyes about dreadful! 'Mad?' I says. And that was it, that was it. He'd got a pig on his little farm there what had gone mad, and he wanted us to come and shoot it; he was on leave and he hadn't got any ammunition. So Hubert Luxter he says, 'Come on, some of you,' and we all goes with the yoossar and shot the pig for him. Ah, that was a pig! And when it died it jumped a somersault just like a rabbit. It had got the mange, and was mad as anything I ever see in my life; it was full of madness. Couldn't hit him at all at first, and it kicked up bobs-a-dying. 'Ready, present, fire!' Hubert Luxter says, and bang goes the six of us, and every time we missed him he spotted us and we had to run for our lives."

As Harvey looked up he caught a glance of the girl fixed on him. She dropped her gaze at once and, turning away, walked off to the house.

"Come and take a look at the meadow," said Mrs. Sadgrove to him, and they went into the soft smooth meadow where the black pony was grazing. Very bright and green it was, and very blue the sky. He sniffed at the pink rose in his buttonhole, and determined that come what might he would give it to Mary if he could get a nice quiet chance to offer it. And just then, while he and Mrs. Sadgrove were strolling alone in the soft smooth meadow, quite alone, she suddenly,

startlingly, asked him: "Are you courting anybody?"

"Beg pardon, ma'am?" he exclaimed.

"You haven't got a sweetheart, have you?" she asked most deliberately.

Harvey grinned sheepishly: "Ha, ha, ha," and then he said "No."

"I want to see my daughter married," the widow went on significantly.

"Miss Mary!" he cried.

"Yes," said she; and something in the higgler's veins began to pound rapidly. His breast might have been a revolving cage and his heart a demon squirrel. "I can't live for ever," said Mrs. Sadgrove, almost with levity, "in fact, not for long, and so I'd like to see her settled soon with some decent understanding young man, one that could carry on here, and not make a mess of things."

"But, but," stuttered the understanding young man, "I'm no scholar, and she's a lady. I'm a poor chap, rough, and no scholar, ma'am. But mind you . . ."

"That doesn't matter at all," the widow interrupted, "not as things are. You want a scholar for learning, but for the land . . ."

"Ah, that's right, Mrs. Sadgrove, but . . ."

"I want to see her settled. This farm, you know, with the stock and things are worth nigh upon three thousand pounds."

"You want a farmer for farming, that's true, Mrs. Sadgrove, but when you come to marriage, well, with her learning and French and all that . . ."

"A sensible woman will take a man rather than a box of tricks any day of the week," the widow retorted. "Education may be a fine thing, but it often costs a lot of foolish money."

"It do, it do. You want to see her settled?"

"I want to see her settled and secure. When she is twenty-five she comes into five hundred pounds of her own right."

The distracted higgler hummed and haa-ed in his bewilderment as if he had just been offered the purchase of a dubious duck. "How old is she, ma'am?" he at last huskily inquired.

"Two-and-twenty nearly. She's a good healthy girl, for I've never spent a pound on a doctor for her, and very quiet she is, and very sensible; but she's got a strong will of her own, though you might not think it or believe it."

"She's a fine creature, Mrs. Sadgrove, and I'm very fond

of her. I don't mind owning up to that, very fond of her I am."

"Well, think it over, take your time, and see what you think. There's no hurry, I hope, please God."

"I shan't want much time," he declared with a laugh, "but I doubt I'm the fair right sort for her."

"Oh, fair days, fair doings!" said she inscrutably, "I'm not a long liver, I'm afraid."

"God forbid, ma'am!" His ejaculation was intoned with deep gravity.

"No, I'm not a long-living woman," She surveyed him with her calm eyes, and he returned her gaze. Hers was a long fallow face, with heavy lips. Sometimes she would stretch her features (as if to keep them from petrifying) in an elastic grin, and display her dazzling teeth; the lips would curl thickly, no longer crimson, but blue. He wondered if there were any sign of a doom registered upon her gaunt face. She might die, and die soon.

"You couldn't do better than think it over, then, eh?" she had a queer frown as she regarded him.

"I couldn't do worse than not, Mrs. Sadgrove," he said gaily.

They left it at that. He had no reason for hurrying away, and he couldn't have explained his desire to do so, but he hurried away. Driving along past the end of the moor, and peering back at the lonely farm where they dwelled amid the thick furze snoozing in the heat, he remembered that he had not asked if Mary was willing to marry him! Perhaps the widow took her agreement for granted. That would be good fortune, for otherwise how the devil was he to get round a girl who have never spoken half a dozen words to him! And never would! She was a lady, a girl of fortune, knew her French; but there it was, the girl's own mother was asking him to wed her. Strange, very strange! He dimly feared something, but he did not know what it was he feared. He had still got the pink rose in his buttonhole.

#### IV

At first his mother was incredulous; when he told her of the astonishing proposal she declared he was a joker; but she was soon as convinced of his sincerity as she was

amazed at his hesitation. And even vexed: "Was there anything the matter with this Mary?"

"No, no, no! She's quiet, very quiet indeed, I tell you, but a fine young woman, and a beautiful young woman. Oh, she's all right, right as rain, right as a trivet, right as ninepence. But there's a catch in it somewheres, I fear. I can't see through it yet, but I shall afore long, or I'd have the girl, like a shot I would. 'Tain't the girl, mother, it's the money, if you understand me."

"Well, I don't understand you, certainly I don't. What about Sophy?"

"Oh lord!" He scratched his head ruefully.

"You wouldn't think of giving this the go-by for Sophy, Harvey, would you? A girl as you ain't even engaged to, Harvey, would you?"

"We don't want to chatter about that," declared her son. "I got to think it over, and it's going to tie my wool, I can tell you, for there's a bit of craft somewheres, I'll take my oath. If there ain't there ought to be!"

Over the alluring project his decision wavered for days, until his mother became mortified at his inexplicable vacillation.

"I tell you," he cried, "I can't make tops or bottoms of it all. I like the girl well enough, but I like Sophy, too, and it's no good bearing about the bush. I like Sophy, she's the girl I love; but Mary's a fine creature, and money like that wants looking at before you throw it away, love or no love. Three thousand pounds! I'd be a made man."

And as if in sheer spite to his mother; as if a bushel of money lay on the doorstep for him to kick over whenever the fancy seized; in short (as Mrs. Witlow very clearly intimated) as if in contempt of Providence he began to pursue Sophy Daws with a new fervour, and walked with that young girl more than he was accustomed to, more than ever before; in fact, as his mother bemoaned, more than he had need to. It was unreasonable, it was a shame, a foolishness; it wasn't decent and it wasn't safe.

On his weekly visits to the farm his mind still wavered. Mrs. Sadgrove let him alone; she was very good, she did not pester him with questions and entreaties. There was Mary with her white dress and her red hair and her silence; a girl with a great fortune, walking about the yard, or sitting

in the room, and casting not a glance upon him. Not that he would have known it if she did, for now he was just as shy of her. Mrs. Sadgrove often left them alone, but when they were alone he could not dish up a word for the pretty maid; he was dumb as a statue. If either she or her mother had lifted so much as a finger then there would have been an end to his hesitations or suspicions, for in Mary's presence the fine glory of the girl seized him incontinently; he was again full of a longing to press her lips, to lay down his doubts, to touch her bosom—though he could not think she would ever allow that! Not an atom of doubt about *her* ever visited him; she was unaware of her mother's queer project. Rather, if she became aware he was sure it would be the end of him. Too beautiful she was, too learned, and too rich. Decidedly it was his native cunning, and no want of love, that inhibited him. Folks with property did not often come along and bid you help yourself. Not very often! And throw in a grand bright girl, just for good measure as you might say. Not very often.

For weeks the higgler made his customary calls, and each time the outcome was the same; no more, no less. "Some dodge," he mused, "something the girl don't know and the mother does." Were they going bankrupt, or were they mortgaged up to the neck, or was there anything the matter with the girl, or was it just the mother wanted to get hold of him? He knew his value if he didn't know his own mind, and the value couldn't match that girl any more than his mind could. So what *did* they want him for? Whatever it was Harvey Witlow was ready for it whenever he was in Mary's presence, but once away from her his own craftiness asserted itself: it was a snare, they were trying to make a mock of him!

But nothing could prevent his own mother mocking him, and her treatment of Sophy was so unbearable that if the heart of that dusky beauty had not been proof against all impediments, Harvey might have had to whistle for her favour. But whenever he was with Sophy he had only one heart, undivided and true, and certain as time itself.

"I love Sophy best. It's true enough I love Mary, too, but I love Sophy better. I know it; Sophy's the girl I must wed. It might not be so if I weren't all dashed and doddered about the money; I don't know. But I do know that Mary's



innocent of all this craftiness; it's her mother trying to mogue me into it."

Later he would be wishing he could only forget Sophy and do it. Without the hindrance of conscience he could do it, catch or no catch.

He went on calling at the farm, with nothing said or settled, until October. Then Harvey made up his mind, and without a word to the Sadgroves he went and married Sophy Daws and gave up calling at the farm altogether. This gave him some feeling of dishonesty, some qualm, and a vague unhappiness; likewise he feared the cold hostility of Mrs. Sadgrove. She would be terribly vexed. As for Mary, he was nothing to her, poor girl; it was a shame. The last time he drove that way he did not call at the farm. Autumn was advancing, and the apples were down, the bracken dying, the furze out of bloom, and the farm on the moor looked more and more lonely, and most cold, though it lodged a flame-haired silent woman, fit for a nobleman, whom they wanted to mate with a common higgler. Crafty, you know, too crafty!

## v

The marriage was a gay little occasion, but they did not go away for a honeymoon. Sophy's grandmother from a distant village, Cassandra Fundy, who had a deafness and a speckled skin, brought her third husband, Amos, whom the family had never seen before. Not a very wise man, indeed he was a common man, stooping like a decayed tree, he was so old. But he shaved every day and his hairless skull was yellow. Cassandra, who was yellow too, had long since turned into a fool; she did not shave, though she ought to have done. She was like to die soon, but everybody said old Amos would live to be a hundred; it was expected of him, and he too, was determined.

The guests declared that a storm was threatening, but Amos Fundy denied it and scorned it.

"Thunder p'raps, but 'twill clear; 'tis only de pride o' der morning."

"Don't you be a fool," remarked his wife enigmatically, "you'll die soon enough."

"You must behold der moon," continued the octogenarian;

"de closer it is to der wheel, de closer der rain; de furder away it is, de furder der rain."

"You could pour that man's brains into a thimble," declared Cassandra of her spouse, "and they wouldn't fill it—he's deaf."

Fundy was right; the day did clear. The marriage was made and the guests returned with the man and his bride to their home. But Fundy was also wrong, for storm came soon after and rain set it. The guests stayed on for tea, and then, as it was no better, they feasted and stayed till night. And Harvey began to think they never would go, but of course they couldn't and so there they were. Sophy was looking wonderful in white stockings and shiny shoes and a red frock with a tiny white apron. A big girl she seemed, with her shaken dark hair and flushed face. Grandmother Fundy spoke seriously, but not secretly to her.

"I've had my fourteen touch of children," said Grandmother Fundy. "Yes, they were flung on the mercy of God—poor little devils. I've followed most of 'em to the churchyard. You go slow, Sophy."

"Yes, granny."

"Why," continued Cassandra, embracing the whole company, as it were, with her disclosure, "my mother had me by some gentleman!"

The announcement aroused no response except sympathetic, and perhaps encouraging, nods from the women.

"She had me by some gentleman—she ought to ha' had a twal' month, she did!"

"Wasn't she ever married?" Sophy inquired of her grandmother.

"Married? Yes, of course she was," replied the old dame, "of course. But marriage ain't everything. Twice she was, but not to he, she wasn't."

"Not to the gentleman?"

"No! Oh, no! He'd got money—bushels! Marriage ain't much, not with these gentry."

"Ho, ho, that's a tidy come-up!" laughed Harvey.

"Who was that gentleman?" Sophia's interest was deeply engaged. But Cassandra Fundy was silent, pondering like a china image. Her gaze was towards the mantelpiece, where there were four lamps—but only one usable—and two clocks—but only one going—and a coloured greeting

card a foot long with large letters KEEP SMILING adorned with lithographic honeysuckle.

"She's hard of hearing," interpolated grandfather Amos, "very hard, gets worse. She've a horn at home, big as that . . ." His eyes roved the room for an object of comparison, and he seized upon the fire shovel that lay in the fender. "Big as that shovel. Crown silver it is, and solid, a beautiful horn, but"—he brandished the shovel before them—"her won't use 'en."

"Granny, who was that gentleman?" shouted Sophy. "Did you know him?"

"No! no!" declared the indignant dame. "I dunno ever his name, nor I don't want to. He took hisself off to Ameriky, and now he's in the land of heaven. I never seen him; if I had I'd a given it to him properly; oh, my dear, not blayguarding him, you know, but just plain language! Where's your seven commandments?"

At last the rain abated. Peeping into the dark garden you could see the fugitive moonlight hung in a million raindrops in the black twigs of all sorts of bushes and trees, while along the cantle of the porch a line of raindrops hung, even and regular, as if they were nailheads made of glass. So all the guests departed, in one long staggering, struggling, giggling, and guffawing body, into the village street. The bride and her man stood in the porch, watching and waving hands. Sophy was momentarily grieving: what a lot of trouble and fuss when you announced that henceforward you were going to sleep with a man because you loved him true! She had said good-bye to her grandmother Cassandra, to her father and her little sister. She had hung on her mother's breast, sighing an almost intolerable farewell to innocence—never treasured until it is gone, and thenceforward a pretty sorrow cherished more deeply than wilder joys.

Into Harvey's mind, as they stood there at last alone, stole an image of a bright-haired girl, lovely, silent, sad, whom he felt he had deeply wronged. And he was sorry. He had escaped the snare, but if there had been no snare he might this night have been sleeping with a different bride. And it would have been just as well. Sophy looked but a girl with her blown hair and wet face. She was wiping her tears on the tiny apron. But she had the breasts of a woman and decoying eyes.

"Sophy, Sophy!" breathed Harvey, wooing her in the darkness.

"It blows and it rains, and it rains and it blows," chattered the crumpled bride, "and I'm all so bescrumbled I can't tell wet from windy."

"Come, my love," whispered the bridegroom, "come in, to home."

## VI

Four or five months later the higgler's affairs had again taken a rude turn. Marriage, alas, was not all it might be; his wife and his mother quarrelled unendingly. Sometimes he sided with the one and sometimes with the other. He could not yet afford to instal his mother in a separate cottage, and therefore even Sophy had to admit that her mother-in-law had a right to be living there with them, the home being hers. Harvey hadn't bought much of it; and though he was welcome to it all now, and it would be exclusively his as soon as she died, still it was her furniture, and you couldn't drive any woman (even your mother) off her own property. Sophy, who wanted a home of her own, was vexed and moody, and antagonistic to her man. Business, too, had gone down sadly of late. He had thrown up the Shag Moor round months ago; he could not bring himself to go there again, and he had not been able to square up the loss by any substantial new connections. On top of it all his horse died. It stumbled on a hill one day and fell, and it couldn't get up, or it wouldn't—at any rate, it didn't. Harvey thrashed it and coaxed it, then he cursed it and kicked it; after that he sent for a veterinary man and the veterinary man ordered it to be shot. And it was shot. A great blow to Harvey Witlow was that. He had no money to buy another horse; money was tight with him, very tight; and so he had to hire at fabulous cost a decrepit nag that ate like a good one. It ate—well, it would have astonished you to see what that creature disposed of, with hay the price it was, and corn gone up to heaven nearly. In fact Harvey found that he couldn't stand the racket much longer, and as he could not possibly buy another it looked very much as if he was in queer street once more, unless he could borrow the money from some friendly person. Of course there were plenty

of friendly persons, but they had no money, just as there were many persons who had the money but were not what you might call friendly ; and so the higgler began to reiterate twenty times a day, and forty times a day, that he was entirely and absolutely damned and done. Things were thus very bad with him, they were at their worst—for he had a wife to keep now, as well as a mother, and a horse that ate like Satan, and worked like a gnat—when it suddenly came into his mind that Mrs. Sadgrove was reputed to have a lot of money, and had no call to be unfriendly to him. He had his grave doubts about the size of her purse, but there could be no harm in trying so long as you approached her in a right reasonable manner.

For a week or two he held off from this appeal, but the grim spectre of destitution gave him no rest, and so, near the close of a wild March day he took his desperate courage and his cart and the decrepit nag to Shag Moor. Wild it was, though dry, and the wind against them, a vast turmoil of icy air strident and baffling. The nag threw up its head and declined to trot. Evening was but an hour away, the fury of the wind did not retard it, nor the clouds hasten it. Low down the sun was quitting the wrack of storm, exposing a jolly orb of magnifying fire that shone flush under eaves and through the casements of cottages, casting a pattern of lattice and tossing boughs upon the interior walls, lovelier than dreamed-of pictures. The heads of mothers and old dames were also imaged there, recognisable in their black shadows ; and little children held up their hands between window and wall to make five-fingered shapes upon the golden screen. To drive on the moor then was to drive into blasts more dire. Darkness began to fall, and bitter cold it was. No birds to be seen, neither beast nor man ; empty of everything it was except sound and a marvel of dying light, and Harvey Witlow of Dinnop with a sour old nag driving from end to end of it. At Prattle Corner dusk was already abroad ; there was just one shaft of light that broached a sharp-angled stack in the rickyard, an ark of darkness, along whose top the gads and wooden pins and tilted straws were miraculously fringed in the last glare. Hitching his nag to the palings he knocked at the door, and knew in the gloom that it was Mary who opened it and stood peering forth at him.

"Oh!" the girl utter a cry, "Higgler! What do you come for?" It was the longest sentence she had ever spoken to him, a sad frightened voice.

"I thought," he begun, "I'd call—and see Mrs. Sadgrove. I wondered . . ."

"Mother's dead," said the girl. She drew the door farther back, as if inviting him, and he entered. The door was shut behind him, and they were alone in the darkness, together. The girl was deeply grieving. Trembling, he asked the question; "What is it you tell me, Mary?"

"Mother's dead," repeated the girl "all day, all day, all day." They were close to each other, but he could not see her. All round the house the wind roved lamentingly, shuddering at doors and windows. "She died in the night. The doctor was to have come, but he has not come all day," Mary whispered, "all day, all day. I don't understand; I have waited for him, and he has not come. She died, she was dead in her bed this morning, and I've been alone all day, all day, and I don't know what is to be done."

"I'll go for the doctor," he said hastily, but she took him by the hand and drew him into the kitchen. There was no candle lit; a fire was burning there, richly glowing embers, that laid a gaunt shadow of the table across a corner of the ceiling. Every dish on the dresser gleamed, the stone floor was rosy, and each smooth curve on the dark settle was shining like ice. Without invitation he sat down.

"No," said the girl, in a tremulous voice, "you must help me." She lit a candle: her face was white as the moon, her lips were sharply red, and her eyes were wild. "Come," she said, and he followed her behind the settle and up the stairs to a room where there was a disordered bed, and what might be a body lying under the quilt. The higgler stood still, staring at the form under the quilt. The girl, too, was still and staring. Wind dashed upon the ivy at the window and hallooed like a grieving multitude. A crumpled gown hid the body's head, but thrust from under it, almost as if to greet him, was her naked lean arm, the palm of the hand lying uppermost. At the foot of the bed was a large washing bowl, with sponge and towels.

"You've been laying her out! Yourself!" exclaimed Witlow. The pale girl set down the candle on a chest of drawers. "Help me now," she said, and moving to the bed

she lifted the crumpled gown from off the face of the dead woman, at the same time smoothing the quilt closely up to the body's chin. "I cannot put the gown on, because of her arm, it has gone stiff." She shuddered, and stood holding the gown as if offering it to the man. He lifted that dead naked arm and tried to place it down at the body's side, but it resisted and he let go his hold. The arm swung back to its former outstretched position, as if it still lived and resented that pressure. The girl retreated from the bed with a timorous cry. "Get me a bandage," he said, "or something we can tear up."

She gave him some pieces of linen.

"I'll finish this for you," he brusquely whispered, "you get along down-stairs and take a swig of brandy. Got any brandy?"

She did not move. He put his arm around her and gently urged her to the door.

"Brandy," he repeated, "and light your candles."

He watched her go heavily down the stairs before he shut the door. Returning to the bed he lifted the quilt. The dead body was naked and smelt of soap. Dropping the quilt he lifted the outstretched arm again, like cold wax to the touch and unpliant as a sturdy sapling, and tried once more to bend it to the body's side. As he did so the bedroom door blew open with a crash. It was only a draught of the wind, and a loose latch—Mary had opened a door downstairs, perhaps—but it awed him, as if some invisible looker were there resenting his presence. He went and closed the door, the latch had a loose hasp, and tiptoeing nervously back he seized the dreadful arm with a sudden brutal energy, and bent it by thrusting his knee violently into the hollow of the elbow. Hurriedly he slipped the gown over the head and inserted the arm in the sleeve. A strange impulse of modesty stayed him for a moment: should he call the girl and let her complete the robing of the naked body under the quilt? That preposterous pause seemed to add a new anger to the wind, and again the door sprang open. He delayed no longer, but letting it remain open, he uncovered the dead woman. As he lifted the chill body the long outstretched arm moved and tilted like the boom of a sail, but crushing it to its side he bound the limb fast with strips of linen. So Mrs. Sadgrove was made ready for her coffin. Drawing the quilt back to

her neck, with a gush of relief he glanced about the room. It was a very ordinary bedroom; bed, washstand, chest of drawers, chair, and two pictures—one of a deeply religious import, and the other a little pink print, in a gilded frame, of a bouncing nymph recumbent upon a cloud. It was queer: a lot of people, people whom you wouldn't think it of, had that sort of picture in their bedrooms.

Mary was now coming up the stairs again, with a glass half full of liquid. She brought it to him. "No, you drink it," he urged, and Mary sipped the brandy.

"I've finished—I've finished," he said as he watched her, "she's quite comfortable now."

The girl looked her silent thanks at him, again holding out the glass. "No, sup it yourself," he said; but as she stood in the dim light, regarding him with her strange gaze, and still offering the drink, he took it from her, drained it at a gulp and put the glass upon the chest, beside the candle. "She's quite comfortable now. I'm very grieved, Mary," he said with awkward kindness, "about all this trouble that's come on you."

She was motionless as a wax image, as if she had died in her steps, her hand still extended as when he took the glass from it. So piercing was her gaze that his own drifted from her face and took in again the objects in the room: the washstand, the candle on the chest, the little pink picture. The wind beat upon the ivy outside the window as if a monstrous whip were lashing its slaves.

"You must notify the registrar," he began again, "but you must see the doctor first."

"I've waited for him all day," Mary whispered, "all day. The nurse will come again soon. She went home to rest in the night." She turned towards the bed. "She has only been ill a week."

"Yes?" he lamely said. "Dear me, it is sudden."

"I must see the doctor," she continued.

"I'll drive you over to him in my gig." He was eager to do that.

"I don't know," said Mary slowly.

"Yes, I'll do that, soon's you're ready, Mary," he fumbled with his speech, "I'm not wanting to pry into your affairs, or any thing as don't concern me, but how are you going to get along now? Have you got any relations?"



"No," the girl shook her head, "No."

"That's bad. What was you thinking of doing? How has she left you—things were in a baddish way, weren't they?"

"Oh, no." Mary looked up quickly. "She has left me very well off. I shall go on with the farm; there's the old man and the boy—they've gone to a wedding to-day; I shall go on with it. She was so thoughtful for me, and I would not care to leave all this, I love it."

"But you can't do it by yourself, alone?"

"No. I'm to get a man to superintend, a working bailiff," she said.

"Oh!" And again they were silent. The girl went to the bed and lifted the covering. She saw the bound arm and then drew the quilt tenderly over the dead face. Witlow picked up his hat and found himself staring again at the pink picture. Mary took the candle preparatory to descending the stairs. Suddenly the higgler turned to her and ventured: "Did you know as she once asked me to marry you?" he blurted.

Her eyes turned from him, but he guessed—he could feel that she *had* known.

"I've often wondered why," he murmured, "why she wanted that."

"She didn't," said the girl.

That gave pause to the man; he felt stupid at once, and roved his fingers in a silly way along the roughened nap of his hat.

"Well, she asked me to," he bluntly protested.

"She knew," Mary's voice was no louder than a sigh, "that you were courting another girl, the one you married."

"But, but," stuttered the honest higgler, "if she knew that why did she want for me to marry you?"

"She didn't," said Mary again; and again, in the pause, he did silly things to his hat. How shy this girl was, how lovely in her modesty and grief! "I can't make tops or bottoms of it," he said; "but she asked me, as sure as God's my maker."

"I know. It was me, I wanted it."

"You!" he cried, "you wanted to marry me!"

The girl bowed her head, lovely in her grief and modesty: "She was against it, but I made her ask you."

"And I hadn't an idea that you cast a thought on me," he murmured. "I feared it was a sort of trick she was playing on me. I didn't understand, I had no idea that you knew about it even. And so I didn't ever ask you."

"Oh, why not, why not? I was fond of you then," whispered she. "Mother tried to persuade me against it, but I was fond of you—then."

He was in a queer distress and confusion. "Oh, if you'd only tipped me a word, or given me a sort of look," he sighed. "Oh, Mary!"

She said no more, but went downstairs. He followed her and immediately fetched the lamps from his gig. As he lit the candles: "How strange," Mary said, "that you should come back just as I most needed help. I am very grateful."

"Mary, I'll drive you to the doctor's now."

She shook her head; she was smiling.

"Then I'll stay till the nurse comes."

"No, you must go. Go at once."

He picked up the two lamps, and turning at the door said: "I'll come again to-morrow." Then the wind rushed into the room: "Good-bye," she cried, shutting the door quickly behind him.

He drove away into deep darkness, the wind howling, his thoughts strange and bitter. He had thrown away a love, a love that was dumb and hid itself. By God, he had thrown away a fortune, too! And he had forgotten all about his real errand until now, forgotten all about the loan! Well, let it go; give it up. He would give up higgling; he would take on some other job; a bailiff, a working bailiff, that was the job that would suit him, a working bailiff. Of course there was Sophy; but still—Sophy!



## RICHARD HUGHES

*Lochinvarovič*

Richard Hughes is one of the outstanding figures in the younger generation of literary dramatists. He is Vice-Chairman of the Welsh National Theatre, co-founder of the Portmadoc players, and the first author of a wireless play. He has published several volumes of plays, poems and stories and a remarkable novel, *A High Wind in Jamaica*.



## LOCHINVÁROVIČ

### I

FOR weeks, often, after autumn has definitely taken hold of the Balkan uplands, summer still lingers on the low shores of the Adriatic. Even Trieste still keeps a semblance of summer: though Trieste is now far too melancholy a town to be able to do much with it. Up in the Giulian Alps it is almost winter: on the bare limestone levels of the Karst a steady and biting wind makes a real hardship of sleeping in the open: but once one has dived over the almost precipitous ledge of the plateau that overhangs the city one is once more able to feel the hot dust of the roadway blowing up against one's hands, and to sit for hours on the Mole, staring at the wish-wash of the sea—or at the other people sitting there staring.

But that is, really, another story: it is not my present purpose to explain why I found myself in Trieste. This story is concerned with a rather remarkable love-affair: of which I would have known nothing if it had not happened that I was practically destitute at that time. I took a bed in a common lodging-house, in a row of other beds, and used to buy my food cheap in the market—it was cheap because it certainly would not have been saleable the next day; and go to bed, as late as possible, in my clothes.

The end of it all was that I started off on a long expedition with Mitar Lochinvárovič: but we neither of us emerged from it much richer. It was his idea, and quite a good one: he was distinctly clever, and as loyal a friend as one could hope for, and a very good shot with an automatic, which he much preferred to a knife: but the whole thing broke down because his health was giving way; as generally comes sooner rather than later to men who lead such a hard life

as he had led. Indeed, I doubt whether he is still alive. He had long ceased to draw any satisfaction from smoking, and, when I gave him a cigarette, used to rip it up with his thumb-nail and eat the tobacco. He had suffered from chronic heartburn for years, he told me: and unless he had plenty to drink his hand shook so that he could hardly control it.

His bed was next to mine: On the other side of me was a young Sudanese negro who was always too drunk to be of much use for social purposes. Mitar kept a walking-stick of Napoleon's under his bed, wrapped up in newspaper: and he showed it me one morning, by way of fraternisation. The Emperor had sent it as a present to some Montenegrin lady: Mitar had kept the letter which accompanied it too. He never told me how he came by them: nor how he came by the Great Seal of that once glorious rival to Venice, the Republic of Ragusa, which he carried in his waistcoat pocket. In another pocket of his waistcoat was some very old cheese, and some Greek and Roman coins. It is true that he had been a brigand when he was quite a lad, but I think he acquired these things later. Indeed, he did not make much out of brigandage, or he would not have become an ironmonger—which he did in desperation, he told me: despair of making a living by more normal means. But he presently gave up trade, and became a spy in the Turkish secret service. At last he was caught by the Greeks, court-martialled, and rather badly shot; so that he had a different scar to ache for every possible change of the weather. Indeed, for several years after his execution he was too crippled for a very active life. However, he managed to extract quite a creditable living from the white slave traffic which tided him over till the Great War came, when he obtained a responsible position in the administration of an American Relief Fund in the Balkans.

At the time I met him he had developed an excellent scheme for smuggling opium into the United States. It was very ingenious, because it was so contrived that there was no possible chance of getting imprisoned. The only difficulty lay in making the American buyer pay up. As a second string, he was blacknailing his brother officers of the Relief Fund, who were mostly very well off by now.

But, in spite of all these resources, he had got himself landed in Trieste in a destitute condition. We used to go

and sup together at a little slum wine-shop where he was allowed credit: and sit there afterwards drinking the filthy ink they call *Vino Nero* in Trieste: or *šljivovica*, which is a spirit extracted from plums. Sometimes he would pull out the Great Seal, and expatiate on the glories of the dead Republic: or tell rather fabulous stories about King Dukljan the First—who was, he explained, the earliest king there ever was in the world, and seemed somehow mixed up with Deucalion: or vague and misty stories about being shot and knifed and strangled and raped; or of having one's eyes put out before one was crucified, which is the Macedonian custom. But one evening he explored in the lining of his coat and brought out a woman's photograph, which he handed to me to look at.

It was a bad photograph, but it was enough to convince me that I had never seen so beautiful a woman; and probably never would see.

Mitar took it from my hands and stared at it doggedly. Then he hiccoughed, sighed, and replaced it in his pocket.

## II

Love at first sight is a strange and beautiful invention of the Deity. It is curiously discreet; that is to say, it bears little relation or resemblance to anything else in the Universe: a kind of hint that God is not reasonable by necessity but because He prefers to be: an everlasting reminder of the sort of Universe He could have created had He preferred to be absurd. Of course, looking at it after the event, one can shake one's head and point out this or that reason why it should have occurred, contributive causes as it were: but one can never say that, given such and such circumstances, it *will* occur. One might shake one's head and say that, given an almost Oriental upbringing—in other words, having never seen any man except her father and brothers at close quarters—Natya was bound to fall head over heels in love with the first man she should meet: provided, of course, that he was not her lawfully intended husband. And yet one could not be sure. . . . Or one might say that, given such a beautiful girl as Natya, and given romantic circumstances, given sufficient difficulty in attaining her, an adventurous and inflammable man like Mitar was bound to



fall in love with her the moment he saw her. One might go further : one might argue that, though Mitar can never have been in his person particularly striking, yet the glory of a perfectly colourless American uniform (for it was during the Relief Fund phase) would single him out to her from among the bright-coloured costumes she was used to. One might say that, while in her case she had seen so few men that she might fall in love with anyone, he had seen so many women that he would be able to appreciate how far above other women she was : that while her eye would have the primitive keenness of its appetite completely unspoilt, his would have the added and truer keenness of the connoisseur : like the man who found the treasure in the field, and sold all that he had to buy it.

Those, at any rate, are the arguments one *might* set out, if one was told that Mitar went to Natya's home to borrow a wheelbarrow in the name of the United States of America, and that by some incredible happening he was met at the door by Natya herself, eye to eye.

Mitar borrowed the wheelbarrow : and then, with all the dignity of an American officer in his bearing, trundled it off down the little sandy road to his quarters in the village of Dobruca.

Of course, it was not very long before Natya's mother guessed there was something in the wind. Young girls do not, except on the stage, lean out of their windows night after night talking only to the moon. However fond they may be of their gardens, they do not pour into the dark bushes beneath quite such a flood of endearments as Natya, constant-voiced as the nightingale, used to shower down into the darkness from her little casement each night. And if it had not been that the moonlight lit up the whole white wall of the house, so that if the mother had herself leant from her window she would have been visible from below, she might have heard that these outpourings were no mere monologue. Constant as the nightingale-song from above, there came from the bushes below a murmur like the unstillable sea, a thrilling voice that rose to Natya's window more persistently, more intoxicatingly, more over-poweringly than all the musky perfumes of the garden. If her mother had dared to lean out, she might have seen a little silk kerchief flutter down into the darkness, which Mitar caught and

folded neatly, and placed in his pocket-book together with the notes he kept against a rainy day of his brother-officers' embezzlements. And presently she might have seen a long ribband let down, and then drawing up a small, heavy object tied to it—the Great Seal of the Republic of Ragusa, which Natya quickly hid between her two little breasts. Moreover, she could not fail to notice that Natya by day was changed: that when she should have been industriously embroidering shirts for her brothers, she used instead to lie on her back on her bed, staring vaguely at the ceiling and occasionally touching with the very tips of her fingers the little lump between her breasts.

No more could Major Thuddey fail to notice that Mitar was changed: that when he should have been standing in the hot sun distributing hand-knitted mittens to starving refugees, he would lie instead sound asleep in his bunk till nearly dusk.

You might have thought it was Major Thuddey's duty to reprimand Mitar—as it was certainly Natya's mother's duty to reprimand her daughter: but Major Thuddey was more than a little afraid of Mitar. Major Thuddey was an honest man: but he was also, in the American sense, an idealist: the good name of his Relief Fund and of the United States was dear to him. He deprecated very much the way his subordinates had of selling to the refugees for their own pockets stores they were supposed to distribute free—Lut to bring dishonour on his country by exposing the practice was a crime to so good a patriot quite unthinkable. It was consequently a matter of considerable anxiety to him to notice that Mitar, whose Idealism he had no reason to respect and who was not an American Citizen, was scrupulously honest in all his dealings. He felt (and rightly) that the Good Name of America was somehow imperilled by this honesty: and though he had not the acumen to realise just how Mitar was investing his renunciation of his present chances for the support of his old age—though he did not suspect the existence of Mitar's little sheaf of notes, nor the use he intended to put them to—yet he could not but feel that the presence of a man as honest as himself but without his saving grace of Idealism was somehow dangerous; and, if Mitar lay abed and did nothing—well, all the better.

But Natya's mother had no such reason for silence: she

took an early opportunity of coming into Natya's room, and sitting on Natya's bed and telling her in as calm a voice as possible that all was discovered: that the young man would certainly be shot at the first opportunity. By this means she hoped to terrify the child into a complete confession that would include the identity of her lover: for all was *not* discovered: the old lady had not the least idea who the nightly visitant was: and it is difficult to arrange for the unobtrusive assassination of a man you have not yet identified. The course of laying an ambush and shooting him under her daughter's window was to be avoided if possible, owing to the way tongues would certainly wag: a dead man at such a time and in such a place would quite belie the proverb, would tell a very obvious tale.

Now at the calm way her mother exploded her bomb, Natya, who had all a child's belief in the intuitive omniscience of its mother, was nearly terrified out of her young life: and the Great Seal of Ragusa, that before had almost seemed to flutter like a live bird against her skin, suddenly seemed to crush through her flesh like a mill-stone. She was seized with a lively sense of the futility of ever attempting to hide anything from one's mother, who knows everything about one by light of nature. But fortunately this sad conviction did not prevent her lying to her mother with skill and coolness. Although having no hope whatever of success, she lied as a matter of principle. Her mother, who had started so calmly, not through calmness of nature, but because she had an unconscious appreciation of the value of crescendo when making a scene, gradually increased in fury and sound: and as her passion increased her discretion decreased: until Natya, while outwardly growing more and more stricken by her mother's wrath, inwardly became more and more elated: for she soon discovered that in the first place her mother did not know who her visitor was: and in the second that her father had not yet been told, but only was about to be. She resolved immediately that wild horses should not drag her lover's name from her; but at the same time she realised what a valuable weapon it was, in making terms for herself; by mildness, tempered by maidenly grief and pity—by abandonment of all defiance, and promising always to reveal the great secret in a day or two—she might get the game into her own hands: for as long as they thought

they were likely to worm her lover's name out of her, so long would they be unable to take drastic measures on her own person.

Quite suddenly, the storm ceased: long before it had run its natural course. Possibly there was enough foundation for Natya's belief in her mother's intuition for the latter to have realised that her wrath was not having the effect it appeared to have, but that inwardly Natya was greatly cheered by it. So she too dissolved in tears, and kissed her daughter very lovingly, and told her in a sad, melancholy way what rosy hopes she had for her future. This was more than poor Natya had bargained for: she was still a child in many ways, and it was difficult to harden herself against the fountain-head of all the love she had ever known: far harder, than to harden herself against the same person when regarded simply as the fountain-head of Authority. However, for the time being she succeeded; and her mother left her at last, bearing away no more information than she brought with her. Indeed, she had only shown her own hand, and consequently had little hope even of taking the young man in an ambush: for she was sensible enough to realise that if Natya were locked up in an iron box and she sat on the lid day and night, the girl would still find some means of conveying a warning to her lover. And so she left, somewhat downcast, but subconsciously determined, if need should arise, to worry herself on to a sick-bed. If her little Natya could stand against that, she reflected, she was not her little Natya.

She did not consider that little Natya was no longer wholly and only *her* little Natya.

As she expected, Natya immediately set about sending a message to her lover, to warn him of the danger of coming to see her. "*Dear One,*" she began to compose in her head, "*you must never try and see me again, or you will certainly be shot.*" In her heart of hearts she was singularly well pleased: this was a love-affair with a vengeance! And then her blood ran cold: suppose her hero laughed at warnings, and came, and was shot dead from a window as cats are shot when they yowl in the night? And then her blood ran colder: suppose he took her warning, and never did come to see her again? Both possibilities were equally unthinkable; *ergo*, she would not think of them. She went on composing her message in her head.

She had wholly overlooked till this moment one sovereign fact. Wild horses certainly could not drag his name from her, for she did not know it! Among all the hundred thousand things she had said to him, she had entirely forgotten to ask him who he was. And therefore she could not send him a message: for she could hardly write a letter to be pinned up in the American Mess, a sort of Battalion Orders:

*"Officers will cease to visit Natya Perunit by night, as arrangements have been made to assassinate them. . . ."*

So, though her brain went round in her head like a wheel, no way of identifying him could she contrive. Well, it could not be helped: he must come once more, and take his chance. After all, it was quite impossible that so glorious and wonderful a person as he was could be laid low by an ordinary bullet: love-stories simply do not end that way. And, at any rate, it removed the awful possibility of his *not* coming at all.

But Natya, with her mind full of these stupendous happenings and her heart bubbling over with its single stupendous emotion, little knew what a matter of touch-and-go it was whether she would ever see Mitar again. I have shown in an entirely convincing fashion how certain it was that these two should fall in love with each other. So convincing, indeed, were the arguments that Mitar never had the least doubt about it; it was, he realised, quite inevitable that he should fall in love with Natya: for he had a logical mind, as well as considerable experience of the subject, and always bowed to the dictates of his reason. Natya might fall in love without in the least knowing why: but for Mitar, who did know why and fully acquiesced in it, assurance was doubly sure. It was accordingly without the least hesitation that he flung himself into the affair, with absolute singleness of mind, absolute conviction of the stupendous nature of his own emotions. Each night, as he thrilled to the very core at the recital of his own devotion, it became more and more plain to him that he could not fail to be madly in love with this marvellous creature whose passion for him was so wonderful and so complete. So that when his Heart every now and then protested somewhat grumpily that it was not in love with her in the least, his Head told it quite flatly that it did not know what it was talking about: that it was in love

with her without knowing it: that it *knew* it was in love with her and was simply being contrary: that outsiders see most of the game, and that it lay with Head, as an intelligent spectator, to decide whether Heart was in love, not with Heart itself at all: that presently Heart would be repenting its wilfulness in the flames of such a consuming passion as it had never felt before.

But still Heart protested, with all the obstinacy of which that organ is capable, that it was not in love with Natya Perunič.

Whereupon Head, realising the futility of logical argument, tried to work upon Heart's feelings. It, Head, had done everything for Heart the latter could wish: had even sacrificed time that should have been given to the elaboration of that little note-book: had risked career, personal safety—everything, in its readiness to follow the dictates of Heart: and now Heart repaid it by having no dictates at all!

But still Heart persisted that that was as it might be, but that it was not in love with Natya Perunič.

Very well then, said Head, your obstinacy has got us into the soup. For that we have between us worked the poor girl into a pretty state of passion there can be no doubt. An organ of your sensibility surely cannot propose that we should now desert her. All I ask of you is to suspend judgment. We owe it to her to go through with this business as we have begun: and I have no doubt whatever that the time will come when you will thank me, when you will be madly in love with her, and will be extremely grateful that I have refused to listen to you now.

That is as it may be, replied Heart: the future is not my province and you can act as you like: my only duty is to record the state of my feelings at the present moment, and the long and the short of it is, that I am not in love with Natya Perunič.

—It must not be supposed that his dialogue actually took place, or that Mitar argued it out clearly at all: it is simply an analysis for the reader's benefit of the generally uneasy state of mind in which he found himself; now deciding to carry her off to the other side of the world, now deciding never to go near her again; and absolutely refusing to admit to himself that he was not in love with Natya Perunič.

Moreover, it was only natural that to a man of his matured

senses there should be something unsatisfactory in such love-making, with the two persons as securely separated by the barrier of ten vertical feet of air as they would have been by ten horizontal feet of adamant.

It was therefore, as I have said, touch-and-go whether Natya would ever see her ardent lover again: just as it was touch-and-go whether *he* would ever see the light of day again if she did. But it was inevitable that in a man of Mitar's type, as the reader will have guessed from the details of his past and future which I have given, that unselfishness should ultimately conquer: that the thought of leaving a girl so extremely lovely to pine for him unrequited would be ultimately put out of court. One must, on these occasions, occasionally sacrifice one's own feelings. Accordingly, before setting out he provided himself with a rope long enough and strong enough to overcome the ten-foot airy barrier he found so irksome; and resolved to see Natya Perunič once and for all.

The next night, then, found him once more at his place in the bushes, bubbling his devotions into the air like a garden fountain, where they met and mingled with the sighs and protestations of the maiden so far over his head; for just as he found it quite impossible to tell her (so unselfish he was) that all he said was said, so to speak, through his hat, so Natya, in *her* unselfishness, found it quite impossible to shatter his happiness (and interrupt the flow) by rude news of the imminent personal danger to which it exposed him.

Mitar, with the whole night before him and a nice sense of the pleasures of anticipation, was in no hurry to broach his project: and so an hour passed, and still the rope remained coiled under his coat.

But at length he resolved to act: and without for a moment interrupting the scintillation of his love-making, uncoiled it, ready to throw.

And now at last little Natya leant from the window as far as she could, hands outstretched to catch the line: and Mitar stood below, in act to throw.

A large and quite unprepossessing hand appeared in the moonlight over Natya's head, and twined itself very firmly in her hair. One tug, one scream—and where before her arms and cheek had gleamed in the moonlight, now nothing

was visible except the spouts of two rifles, that poked out a few inches from the sill like the little lead cistern-overflow pipes in the wall of an English villa. Nor were they long in discharging their accumulation of wrath into the garden : and very near that cat came, who had so long yowled unmolested through the night, to a mortal soaking.

But Mitar was more adapted to making quick decisions, acting on the merits of the situation without undue delay, than are most officials in charge of the distribution of charitable funds. At the first gleam of those fingers in the moonlight, Mitar, all his eloquence checked, was crawling away on his stomach through the shrubbery, dragging his ridiculous ten-foot tail wriggling behind him.

## III

After this incident it was only natural that Head should somewhat weaken in the opposition it raised to Heart. It is all very well to run risks when one is madly infatuated : but deliberately to get oneself shot in a shrubbery in the cause of Unselfishness that amounted to little more than a point of punctilio is altogether absurd : while the sole very moderate personal satisfaction with which Mitar had intended to reward himself could be purchased in any town of considerable size with perfect safety for about four *lire*. And it only shows the perverseness of Heart, that it, too, began to weaken in its opposition to Head : that after a week of enforced separation it was no longer at all so firm in its conviction that it was not in the least in love with Natya Perunič.

However, in this contest of adaptability to the opposite point of view, it was Head which ultimately carried the day, being even more ready to give up the whole affair than Heart was to continue it. It is highly probable that the two lovers would never have seen each other again if it had not been for Zdenka : who now enters the story in the role of Fairy Godmother, or *Diabolus ex machina*, whichever way you like to look at it. Zdenka was the assistant in the photographic studio which some enterprising person had established in Dobrucca. It was only a small wooden shanty, but excellently equipped : being furnished with a red plush sofa, a plaster




balustrade with no behind to it, a white calico screen, and a monochrome landscape background of Fifth Avenue.

There was, of course, no camera. On its first establishment it had actually done a little business with the American Relief-workers: but after they had been photographed in every possible position, and in every combination and permutation of grouping, business languished. Most of the villagers, after being photographed at one age in one position, made it last a lifetime. In consequence, the proprietor had been compelled to dismount his machine from its complicated stand, and now earned a precarious living by touring the country, photographing atrocities for sale to the propaganda departments of all the belligerent governments; and also by photographing politicians surrounded by thousands of their supporters, which they bought by the gross at little more than cost price to distribute among their opponents. Meanwhile Zdenka remained in charge of the studio: nominally, at any rate, to make appointments for the proprietor, if ever he should happen to pass that way.

It will therefore be seen that Zdenka, being a New Woman with a profession of her own, possessed a great deal more freedom of movement than a nicely brought up girl like Natya would ever be allowed. Hitherto, Natya had felt nothing but contempt for those hoydens who struggled in the outer darkness of life, instead of vegetating in the inner light of seclusion: her attitude towards Zdenka had been friendly, but decidedly superior; but now she found herself greatly envying that freedom which formerly had so shocked her. For it must not be imagined that having her hair nearly pulled out by the roots was the chief of the unpleasantnesses she had to endure during the next few days: and if her family failed to proceed to extreme measures, it was only for two reasons. In the first place, they had still failed to identify her lover, and still hoped to worm the secret out of her: in the second, it was less than a month now from the date of her wedding, and it is unbecoming in a bride to be black and blue.

Although this matter of her wedding certainly saved Natya from a good deal of physical discomfort, she nevertheless found herself anticipating it with more and more annoyance. Under ordinary circumstances it would have seemed to her quite in the course of nature that she should be married to



a man she had never seen: but now she found herself regarding the prospect almost with aversion.

For the betrothal customs of Western and Eastern Europe, although they coincide in the main, have one important difference. It is a matter of philosophy, the opposition of the Idealistic and the Realistic. In Eastern Europe, when a girl is still a very small child, her parents choose for her a husband, and the betrothal is fixed: and this may be said for the plan, that if the girl has never seen her intended husband, at least her parents have. But in Western Europe, while she is still a child, or even before she is born, her parents choose for her an imaginary husband, and, in their minds, betroth her to him quite as irrevocably as do Balkan parents: an idea, say, of a sober business man, handsome but steady, clever at his work but without any taint of inquiry in his mind. So that in Western Europe, when the child-betrothal takes place, not only has the girl never seen her intended husband, but her parents have not either.

In Natya's case, it was a prominent director of the Eskomptne Banke at Zagreb to whom she was betrothed: a man of quite respectable means, and some intelligence, and a fair allowance of years, called Dr. Pedar Srdić: and it was very wrong of Natya to repine against so excellent a husband.

Nevertheless, an almost unheard-of project began to suggest itself to her. She would run away with Mitar to America.

For several days after that disgraceful incident of course she was not allowed to see anyone at all: but it was not long before she obtained leave to see her friend Zdenka: and it was not long before Zdenka, having with difficulty identified him, began to pass on mysterious messages to Mitar. They proved very disturbing to his peace of mind: for he had hardly come to the decision never to see Natya again when those devoted little communications from her began to leak through, telling him how she languished, what she suffered for his sake: begging him to come and see her once again, if only *once*: messages which almost fired him to forget his new resolution. But each time when he almost decided to go, the memory of those two little overflow pipes projecting from the wall was too much for him: try as he would, he could not go. Meanwhile, he was quite sensible of a new

danger : if he did not go, Zdenka might suspect him of being a coward, and a deceiver ; and if she got angry with him she might give away the whole affair to Natya's parents—which would be disastrous. In consequence, he took the most elaborate pains with his excuses, and made them so specious and convincing that for a time they failed to arouse the suspicions not only of the ingenuous Natya, but even of the more worldly-wise Zdenka.

It is improbable, however, that this could have lasted : the crisis would have been bound to be precipitated, were it not for a fortunate occurrence. A fortnight before her marriage, Natya got leave to go and be photographed. The proprietor was spending a few hours in Dobruca to collect some plates which Zdenka had developed : and an appointment was arranged. Zdenka hurried with the news to Mitar. So he was concealed in a cupboard, ready to step out the moment the proprietor left. Small wonder if Natya were even more nervous than girls usually are, when they pose for their photographs—knowing that Mitar was watching her through the keyhole of the tall cupboard in the corner. As a matter of fact, he was not : the cupboard was so tightly sealed that he put his nose, not his eye, to the only aperture.

But at last the sitting was over, and the proprietor bundled out of the studio, and Zdenka on guard at the door : and on the red plush sofa, witnessed only by the plaster balustrade that had no behind and the faint, fantastic shadow of Fifth Avenue, Mitar and Natya conducted their first proper love-making.

As soon as she was able sufficiently to collect her wits, Natya broke to Mitar the news that she intended to elope with him. He was to come once more with his rope to her window, but in perfect silence this time : she would climb down, and together they would fly to America.

When she first told him of her imminent marriage he was torn by conflicting emotions, unable to decide whether he was more desolated to lose her or more rejoiced at this ready-made solution of a position grown impossible : but when she suggested elopement, his mind was made up at once : duly and firmly married to Dr. Srdič she must be ! This did not, of course, prevent him welcoming the notion with every expression of joy : and by the time their short

hour was up, he had promised to make all arrangements for flight and to call for Natya within the next three days.

Needless to say, he did not.

Now for the first time Zdenka began to reproach him. But there were so many difficulties, he urged; and plenty of time: Natya would not be married for a whole week: or later, for three days: at length, even:

"Why, she will not be married till to-morrow! What more suitable night than to-night to carry her off?"

Zdenka shook her head, unappeased. She had by now more than grave doubts of Mitar's intentions: she urged him at least to go and see the poor girl once more, even if he could not save her from the imminent ceremony.

"Why, of course I shall," he answered. "I shall go to-night, with my rope, and have a car waiting . . . after to-night, you will never hear of either of us again!"

But Zdenka still shook her head: and Mitar, feeling himself to be quite unconvincing, went out and got very drunk indeed, in order to forget all about it.

#### IV

The wedding procession started out the next morning at six: and Natya, who had sat the whole night by her window in growing despair, looked the most pinched and peaked and hollow-eyed and unhappy young bride. Dr. Srdič was second cousin to a bishop, and so it was towards the little cathedral city of Vojvdo that the wedding procession set out so early, laughing and chaffing, with the prospect of half a day's drive through the mountains ahead of them, and much merrymaking at the end of it, and a return in the evening. They passed up the street of Dobruca, the highly decorated little carts jingling as they went, the men calling and guffawing, the women singing and giggling, the bride quietly sobbing to herself. They passed right under Mitar's window: but he was far too sound asleep to be woken by so light a disturbance. He slept on, the deep and innocent sleep of the intoxicated.

When he did awake, his head was awful. It was nine o'clock. The blinding sun shone straight in at his window. He sat up, clutching at his brows. (It is an unjust God who

has decreed that man should purchase oblivion and irresponsibility at such a price.) His skull seemed to come to pieces in his hands, like a cup in the grasp of a housemaid. It was agony. It felt as if some one with a Victorian sense of humour had wittily attempted to saw his head in two while he slept: and, being surprised at the task, had left his saw wedged in the cleft.

Mitar pressed his hand to his eyeballs and staggered across the room, groping for his belt and boots. Then out into the blinding street and across to the café, where he sank into a little green chair, and ordered a whole bottle of šljivovica—by way of a hair of the dog that had bitten him.

Ten o'clock. Natya would have started four hours ago.

For a moment the pain lulled, and when it lulled he began to remember, which was highly annoying. He tackled the šljivovica seriously, determined that the return of the wedding party should find him as paralytically unconscious and incapable as had its departure. But, after all, why should he worry? Brazen little minx! It had all been on her side, she had entrapped him: he had never been in love with her in the least: and hadn't he nearly got himself shot, just to gratify her whims? His hair bristled uncomfortably at the thought of her two fierce brothers, their incredibly long moustaches, those two little overflow pipes. *Question*: What right has a girl to fall in love with a man? *Answer* None, if it is going to cause him danger and inconvenience.

That gave place to a more placid mood, in which he congratulated himself on the part he had played: management of a difficult situation which for skill, tact, and moral rectitude could hardly be excelled. He really came out of it all very well.

Gradually his headache softened under the bite of the spirit: and soon everything receded from him in a beatific way, just as the world of sense *ought* to recede from a spiritual man. He gradually melted into the Infinite—already his bodily senses were left behind, or at any rate, all mixed up: so that the little green tables of the café only penetrated to him as a tinkling arpeggio to the blaring bass of the sunlight, the booming sky outside: while the rattle of a passing bullock-cart was translated into a series of vivid flashes of colour, and the discomfort of the rickety chair he sat on smelt bitter in his nostrils.

But something was pushing him, shoving up against him,

prodding him in his Nirvana. That was monstrous! He pulled himself together, just enough to ascertain through which of his senses the attack was really directed. Finally, he traced it to his ears: yes, someone was shouting at him. And his bottle had been removed.

With great difficulty he focussed his eyes on the scene around him: and at last discovered Zdenka, standing over him, covering him with abuse from head to foot.

But she did more than that. Seizing a carafe of iced water from a table near by, she poured half of it over his head: and then deliberately tipped the rest, lumps of ice and all, down the back of his neck, holding away the collar of his tunic with her hand.

The remedy was drastic, but it certainly made him better able to listen to what she had to say. He even succeeded in asking her what the devil she meant by it.

"You wicked liar, making poor little Natya fall in love with you! You, to promise to run away with her, and then to sit there drinking like an owl while the poor child is being married to old Srdič! You, to call yourself a brigand! You, to call yourself an officer! You, to call yourself a male man at all!"

"But, my dear little girl, what is all the fuss? You don't dare to suggest I'm a coward, that I'm not going to run away?"

"But, you great embroidered he-liar, she's half-way to Vojvdo by now!"

"There's plenty of time, my child, plenty of time. She won't be married for a couple of hours yet. Must have a drink before starting!"

"But she's twenty miles ahead of you by now!"

"There's plenty of time! . . . Overtakings are in the Hands of God!"

He staggered out of his chair: he had caught sight of one of the Relief Fund Fords which Major Thuddey had left standing outside the mess with the engine running. As he climbed into the driver's seat he turned to repeat solemnly to the astonished Zdenka:

*"In the Hands of God . . ."*

Then he accidentally trod on the gear-pedal and began zig-zagging erratically up the street in low gear, like a lamed rocket, clinging sideways to the steering wheel.

What the ice down his back had begun, the fresh air continued. By the time he had destroyed a fruitstall, and left a mudguard as a sort of pious offering on the corner of the church, he was beginning to drive fairly creditably: at any rate, he sat facing in the right direction, and had succeeded in getting into top gear. Moreover, he had all the drunk man's feeling of confidence in his own skill: he felt that never had he driven so well before. He also had the drunk man's luck: for he drove as hard as he could pelt and miss destruction by inches, yet for the present at any rate, missed it.

Soon he was eating up the miles to Vojvdo: and all the fire in his blood was stirred at his romantic quest. *Natya! Natya!* Her name sang in his ears like a choir of birds. Her lovely face danced in front of him all up the road. Gone was his terror for her villainous brothers, her father, the whole pack of them! He would snatch her from them, carry off his beloved from the altar steps: true love and constancy, youth and the beautiful dreams of youth should conquer in the end, as they always conquered. His name would go down to posterity among the names of Great Lovers: his exploit would be celebrated in poems and plays, along with the heroic elopements of antiquity.

As, indeed, leaving out the little matter of his mental indecision, of which no one need ever know: leaving out the part played by Zdenka with the carafe of iced water, and the amount of stimulant he had consumed before starting on his heroic expedition, and various details of his private life (such as the little note-book), all of which a romantic writer with an eye to a good story would quite certainly suppress: taking the plain, staring facts of the story and asking no awkward questions about mental processes: employing, in short, an artist's undoubted Right of Selection—there was no reason whatever why it should not.

Who knows why Paris ran off with Helen, or what crossed Leander's mind as he swam the Hellespont? Who would be fool enough not to accept these stories at their face value, when their face value was so stirring? Then who would dare to suggest that Mitar, who had braved death to visit his Natya, and now charged recklessly across the mountains to snatch her from the altar steps, was not the most romantic lover of them all?

For it must not be imagined that there was anything comic

in the turn affairs had taken. Mitar might be drunk, but he was not ignorant of the difficulty of his task: and being accustomed to danger, he had also a remarkable power of forcing his mind to sober itself when action was necessary. To carry Natya off from her own house would have been comparatively easy: to carry her off at the church door, when all the wedding guests would have rifles, and would certainly shoot him at sight if they had the least inkling that he was Natya's anonymous lover, was a very serious matter, requiring all the daring and all the coolness he could muster. That it was *l'amour propre* rather than *l'amour* which prompted the adventure did not affect its *dangerousness* a whit. Mitar was no romantic townling, battered on picture-plays and fiction magazines, he was a man who all his life had lived face to face with danger; and if that gave him the necessary practice and skill with which alone such an enterprise could be successfully carried out, it also meant that he knew very well how difficult it all was. As he drove his Ford for all it was worth in the direction of Vojvdo he knew, with a certainty no mere amateur adventurer could have had, how slender were the chances of his ever coming back alive.

And yet he was still so drunk that he could hardly cling to the wheel.

Poor Natya! She had almost given up hope. As the cathedral drew nearer, hope sank lower: she began to envisage the old bishop as if he were some kind of inexorable ogre. Presently the whole party stopped at a little wayside inn, for lunch: dived under the low, vine-covered door, and grouped themselves formally round the bare trestle tables. Natya tried to eat with the rest: but all the time her eye was fixed on the door, or on the window. She hardly heard what they said to her. *He cometh not!*

And yet, what would be the good? Could he venture right into the lion's den?

A long-drawn-out grinding squeak proclaimed that a car had pulled up outside: and presently the door was darkened by the figure of an American officer. Natya dropped her spoon, gazing a moment with popping eyes. Then she recovered herself. No one had noticed. Mitar came in and sat down in a corner, and ordered food.

Natya could not bear to look at him. He had come! But why had he come? Was it to gaze his last at her? Or



was it to carry her off? And why was he pretending to be drunk? Was that a piece of cunning on his part?

So the meal went on: the wedding party eating heartily. Natya eating nothing at all, Mitar eating as well as the state of his stomach would allow.

It was over. The wedding party adjourned to their carts. Mitar did not move: he sat there, as if there was no hurry: and never once looked at Natya.

So that *looking* could not be his purpose in coming.

It was not till they were mounting once more into their seats that they discovered how near an accident they must have been. The axle-pin had come out of the wheel of one of the carts, the wheel itself had been wrenched crooked by the strain. The whole party conferred over it a while, and came to the conclusion that nothing could be done: the vehicle must be left behind. But all the other carts were packed: what about its passengers?

They looked round, and there was the American officer's motor-car; and inside the inn the American officer was dawdling over his lunch.

The solution was obvious; so old Perunič, Natya's father, took the negotiations on his own shoulders. He wandered aimlessly back into the inn: began an aimless conversation with the innkeeper; aimlessly trod on Mitar's toe, and overwhelmed himself with apologies. From that to an equally aimless conversation with the stranger was a short step: and purely in order to make conversation, he recited the story of their mishap. Mitar, who knew perfectly well what was coming, was laconic, and no more helpful than necessary: and it must be confessed that though he expressed sympathy at the mishap, inwardly it caused him little surprise. . . . So, when the moment was ripe, he suggested that, as he also was going to Vojvdo to buy eggs for the Relief Fund, could he give any of them a lift? Would the bride and her mother honour him?

The old man was grateful and astonished: such an idea would never have entered his head, but since the nobleman was so kind . . .

He went out to tell the others of his success: and Natya, with as little haste as she could contrive, began to climb down again from her seat. Meanwhile they were stripping the derelict vehicle of its decorations and draping the old Ford

in proper bridal manner, to take its place in the procession : while Mitar stood in the door of the inn with a bored and superior, if still rather intoxicated, air.

All were ready to start : all but the bride's mother, who still sat in her cart. So they explained to her that she was to ride in the car. Now, whether her famous intuition had begun to work, or whether it was sheer fright, I do not know : but she flatly refused. She never had ridden in a car, and she never would ride in a car : they were inventions of the devil as well as being highly unsafe : and to be terrified out of her life on the day of her daughter's wedding was not at all her idea of pleasure. Why, she would hardly feel Natya was properly married if the girl rode to her wedding in such a thing ! (As, indeed, was highly probable.) In short, she refused outright : and there was nothing for it but for Natya to climb down yet again, and back into the cart : and instead of being able to carry off his lady, Mitar had to be content to take his place meekly in her wedding procession, with four of the bridegroom's caterwauling younger brothers in the car beside him. So do the plans, even of Heroic Lovers, gang all awry.

How often it is that our patron saint looks after us in a way that at first makes us livid with rage—only afterwards we realise his kindly offices, and are properly grateful ! As they left the little inn, Mitar inwardly abused his patron by every name his spiritual tongue could curl round. But as they neared Vojvdo, sobriety gradually returned to him, and he was overcome with astonishment at the part he had set out to play. He, to run off with another man's affianced bride ! And she a girl with whom he was not in love in the least ! All because of the sharp tongue of a wretched photographer's assistant. He thanked his saint with proper fervour, as they entered the narrow streets of Vojvdo, for saving him from so monstrous and so extremely unsafe an act : and he deposited the wedding guests at the door of the cathedral with all unction, promising to call for them in a couple of hours, while he set off to the market to buy two gross of excusatory eggs.

If one were buying two gross of eggs for oneself in the market of Vojvdo, two hours would certainly not be enough for the necessary bargaining : but buying them with public money was a different matter, and in less than thirty minutes

they were all stowed in the bedizened Ford, and Mitar found himself with nothing to do. For a moment he thought of going to the cathedral to see the wedding; but his innate tact revolted against this. Moreover, he reflected, the actual ceremony would be over by now. Then he thought longingly of the wedding feast: so longingly that he turned into a little Gostilna, determined to celebrate the occasion of Natya's wedding by himself, over a bottle or two of his favourite liqueur.

But as the flames of the habitual šljivovica mounted to his head, they wrought a decided change of mind. In the first place, it is well known that intoxication, like sleep, loosens the tongue of the subconscious: and deep in his subconscious, however positively head and heart might agree to the contrary, there lurked a certain regret for the lovely girl (call it love or not as you like, for the stirrings of the subconscious are used to hard names, by now). In the second place, a man may get drunk overnight and drunk again the morning after without much happening: but if he deliberately gets drunk the following afternoon as well, something is bound to give, somewhere: discretion and reason go completely by the board, and whether he wins the Victoria Cross, or finds himself sentenced to several years' hard labour, or matter for the sexton, will be purely a question of the circumstances in which he is situated.

All this Mitar should have known, and gone easy with the bottle: but he did not go easy, and that is how it came to pass that his ambition to become the subject of song and story was fulfilled. By the time he went to pick up the returning wedding guests they were fairly uproariously drunk: but *he* was drunk with a superlative drunkenness, as different from theirs as cheese from chalk: a cold, mad drunkenness, that left him fairly well able to walk and talk, but cut off all memory and all prescience as with a knife: he had no Past and no Future, only a vivid Present with which he grappled with the energy of a tiger. I have seen a man in this state make his teeth meet through another man's leg: I have myself walked round a high building on a lead gutter that sagged in festoons under my weight. But it is rare, this true Bacchic frenzy: and only those who have seen it can realize how far removed from the ordinary puerile bravado of intoxication it is.

But of all this Mitar, as is the way in such cases, gave no hint till the moment was ripe. They were on the homeward journey, the narrow road passing between the rock and a terrific precipice. Mitar had drawn a little ahead of the others with his four young men, and as he rounded a bend he suddenly drew up. Then he pulled out a couple of automatics, and covering his astonished passengers with one hand, trained the other on the bend behind him; determined to shoot, if necessary, the whole wedding party, thirty or forty of them.

As the first cart came in sight he fired. His aim, always good, was now deadly. Three men dropped. The horses were mad with confusion; other men sprang to their heads to force them back into cover. Mitar fired again. A rifle volley replied: but they aimed in order to miss their relatives in the back seat. And Mitar volleyed another three or four shots. Then silence: his clip was empty. He lifted his other gun, alternately firing and covering the terrified four, all the while feeling desperately in his pocket for a spare clip to charge his empty gun. He was not firing aimlessly, be it understood: Natya, her mother, and the other women were as safe as they had been when in the cathedral itself: but one man after another dropped on the narrow road. Only Dr. Srdič himself, lying flat on his stomach at his bride's feet, Mitar could not reach.

By the time he had fired his last shot, the two families of Perunič and Srdič were both reduced by about one-half, but if anything the family of Perunič had suffered most. In order to redress the balance, Mitar loosened the brake, and deliberately drove his car with himself and his four passengers straight over the edge of the cliff.

But his patron saint, who had formerly saved him from indiscretion, now saved him in indiscretion. As the car heeled over sideways he was flung out, and somehow caught with both hands at a tamarisk bush some four feet below the edge. But the bestreamered car and the four young men and the two gross of eggs turned over and over on their eight-hundred-foot drop into the ravine beneath. As he hung there, Mitar bitterly regretted those eggs. . . . But then, he reflected, one cannot make so grand an omelette without the breaking of eggs.

As the astonished wedding party craned their necks over

the cliff, they were just in time to see the Ford, now grown minute and distant, come finally to rest. But they did not see a pair of hands twined firmly in a tamarisk bush a few feet below their noses.

Presently they went on their way—considerably chastened in their merrymaking, it is true ; but it must not be imagined that the incident seemed to them unusual, or of quite so much importance, as it would to the guests at one of our Western weddings. Only Dr. Srdič himself, who, from his many years as a Zagreb banker, had grown used to ways of comparative security, considered it a matter of great import. He had always wondered what to do with his four turbulent younger brothers.

## V

It must be confessed against Natya's count, that she did not treat her husband with that politeness or consideration one civilised being owes to another, let alone a wedded wife to her husband. Once she had ensconced herself in her bedroom, she produced a small but very sharp stiletto of Sheffield steel, and told him she would kill him if he came inside the door. She was wild with grief and love at Mitar's heroic end, and determined to have her cry out in private, without the intrusion of a husband.

Pedar Srdič was not very much impressed by her stiletto, for there are more ways than one of disarming a woman : but in his residence in Zagreb, and contact with that Western world whose outpost it was, had taught him that the marriage customs of his native country were more than a little barbarous : and though he had followed them in form (for he was a true conservative), he was quite ready, now that Natya and he were married, to give her time for them to get acquainted—even to go through an abridged form of courtship—in deference to Western opinion. He was quite prepared to let have her own wilful way ; say, for three days, by which time, if she did not surrender willingly, his conscience would no longer reproach him for taking his rights by force : one day for them to get to know each other, one for him to make love to her, and one for her to fall in love with him : it was a generous allowance.

Meanwhile Natya sat on her bed day and night, without

food or sleep, nursing her little steel imp, with which she more than once decided to kill herself. Of this Srdič had no inkling: for it had not occurred to Natya's mother—let alone her husband, who, of course, had not been told—to connect the uncertain temper of the American officer in the Ford with Natya's secret love-affair. They all put it down to the natural vagaries of a man who had taken too much to drink, and thought no more about it.

Two days passed, and time brought no alleviation to Natya's sorrow. Two days, and still she loved Mitar, still mourned his death in the abyss of despair. Pedar's programme had to be abandoned, owing to her peevish conduct; for when he came to the door she used to go to the window and threaten to throw herself down into the stone courtyard below, if he so much as entered the room. Love-making, and even acquaintance, were thus indefinitely postponed: till presently Pedar lost his temper and told her that if she could not even treat him with common politeness she should get no more law, but be strapped to the bed.

Natya, being no more moved by his threats than his cajoleries, determined at last to make an end of herself: life without Mitar was unbearable, life with Pedar was unbearable, life must end. Perhaps she might be allowed to meet her love in purgatory: indeed, her only dread was that so angelic a man could scarcely be kept there for more than a week or two at most: she shuddered to think of the æons she might have to spend there alone.

And so the story winds to a tragic close, for Mitar, that she believed dead, was alive and well: and even now making plans for her ultimate abduction.

There were many reasons why he had not acted at once on his return to Dobruca. In the first place, it took a couple of days' sleep to restore him to passable health. In the second, he had to explain to Major Thuddey the loss of the car and the eggs—but Major Thuddey was so used, by now, to fantastic explanations of the "loss" of government property that it was not a very difficult matter. And in the third place, it took him a little while to make up his mind. But he soon realised that what he had begun he must finish: that the new respect with which Zdenka treated him would be forfeit if he confined his exploits to a mere meat omelette, and did not carry the girl off in the end at all.

So at last he started off for Srdič's country house, bowling along in yet another stolen Ford with a rope-ladder under the seat. His heart was as full of hope as Natya's of despair. But the scene, with its fitful, moon-splashed sky, was all set for tragedy: for the night she had finally chosen for suicide was the selfsame night he had fixed on for their elopement: and as her lover drove carelessly through the darkness, Natya lay on the great walnut bed for the last time in her life, dressed in her bridal gown, feeling with the point of her stiletto for the right spot between her ribs.

The sudden ping of a pebble on her window so startled her that she actually pricked herself . . . but it was too late. There came another ping. Hardly knowing what she was doing, she rose and opened the casement. Out of the darkness below floated the incredible voice of her beloved.

Her long hair rose away from her head like a mane: the little scratch on her breast smarted. Was it so simple then: was she already dead? Had he risen from the grave to summon her to join him there? Then the end of a rope-ladder floated up into sight, and mechanically she caught it. That reassured her. One does not need a ladder to descend into the grave.

. . . . .

Mitar and Natya were together at last; the last barrier down, driving away through the night, their happiness at last in their own hands: Natya full of love and trust in her hero, Mitar full of satisfaction in the accomplishment of his task, and a growing uneasiness as to what should be done with the girl now he had got her: for that they were irrevocably committed to each other he could not deny. Of one thing only he was absolutely certain: that he was not in the least in love with Natya Srdič.

Most assuredly the story was winding to a tragic close: gone was even that little thread of Sheffield steel by which it had so nearly been avoided.

Mitar drove straight to the house of a married sister of his, who lived some forty miles from Dobruca: and just had time to dump Natya at the door and drive like Hell back to his quarters, if he was to be in before it was light. But he knew very well that could be only a temporary expedient.

## VI

When Natya's flight was discovered, Dr. Srdič was annoyed almost beyond words. It was not merely the loss of his newly wed wife, for her beauty hardly compensated for her uncompromising temper. It was the social consequences which so exercised him.

Dr. Srdič, as I have shown, was a man of humane and advanced views, caught in the toils of a conservative etiquette, against which he had not the courage to revolt. Now immemorial etiquette dictated that in a case like this the injured husband should telegraph for his wife's nearest male relations; and on their arrival should avenge the insult that had been offered him by shooting them dead. Etiquette was equally firm that the unhappy father and brother should accept the invitation as if they were ignorant of its import: and allow themselves to be shot with expressions of polite, if fictitious, surprise. Then, and not till then, the ball was open, and that mortal catch-as-catch-can called a blood-feud would begin between the two families until one or other was exterminated.

Now, it may well be imagined that an enlightened and peaceable banker like Dr. Srdič was much embarrassed at the demands made of him by this social code: little as he wished to shoot old Perunič and his sons, he had even less desire to expose himself to the subsequent bullets of their relations—especially since the loss of his four younger brothers, whose usefulness he now for the first time recognised. He spent several sleepless nights trying to think of a way out: but there was no way out: etiquette was inexorable. With a heavy heart, therefore, he sent the wire: and then sat down to clean an old rusty rifle that he had not handled since he was a boy.

If Dr. Srdič was reluctant to send the wire, it was nothing to the despondency of the Perunič family on its receipt. If Dr. Srdič had debated for three nights before sending it, they debated for six nights before replying.

But it is a sign of true breeding to know when to waive etiquette: and where the banker had failed, they succeeded. They found a way by which honour would be satisfied: and instead of accepting the invitation for himself and his sons, Old Perunič sent his wife and daughters-in-law.



At this no one was more overjoyed than Srdič himself: for he was under no obligation to shoot the women: instead, they were able to sit down quietly together and hold a family parliament.

It was Natya's mother who put two and two together, and confessed the story of Natya's clandestine visitor, and finally drew the thread through the irascible American officer (of whose miraculous escape they had just heard) to her ultimate disappearance.

It was now Srdič's plain duty to set off for Dobruca and shoot Mitar in the street.

But so far had he wandered from the paths of the strict morality of his fathers, that he was singularly loath even to do this. Degenerate times, indeed, when a husband could so shirk his responsibilities! The position, he explained, was extremely difficult. He had, what they of course had not, some knowledge of international affairs, and he assured the eager women that if he were to shoot, under whatever provocation, an American officer, and more especially an officer engaged in the charitable relief of their country, there would be, diplomatically speaking, the devil to pay. The Americans, he explained, are a people with a very weak moral sense, and, so far from recognising the justice of his action, would be certain not only to hang him, but to visit their wrath on the entire countryside. Even if he himself escaped, the catholic outpouring of their wrath would only be all the fiercer: the whole nation would be made to suffer for it, if he allowed himself the luxury of following the dictates of his conscience.

Difficult as the women found it to realise that a Great People could be so unenlightened, so lost to all sense of moral fitness, they had to admit that in questions of the outside world they knew very much less than Pedar. They had to accept his judgment.

Then there was only one thing to be done. They must call in the bishop. He, the Bishop of Vojvdo, Srdič's cousin, who had officiated at the ceremony: it was for him to visit the American (for they were unaware how slender were Mitar's claims to that title) and to reason with him. It only shows how far gone they were in laxity, how quickly and harmfully the smallest breach of etiquette widens, that they should be so easily driven to have recourse to Reason.

All this time, of course, Mitar went about in a state of double uneasiness. He was extremely worried as to what was to be done with Natya: and he was not at all sure that he might not be shot at any hour of the day or night.

Then came the news that the bishop wished to see him, and, in some trepidation, he went. At first it seemed incredible that the enemy should have been reduced to so mild a form of retaliation as mere talk: but that this was the case the old man made clear.

"My son," he began, "you are in danger of Hell. You are living in adultery with another man's wife."

Mitar, with an air of great innocence, asked: "Whose?"

"With Natya, the wife of Dr. Pedar Srdič."

Mitar's countenance expressed relief: it was untrue, he explained: Mme Srdič was staying in the mountains with a married sister of his, and he had not himself been near the place.

The bishop had to admit that this was true, and that it was hardly the conduct of the usual adulterer.

"At any rate," he went on, "you are conniving at keeping a married woman forcibly from her husband."

"I am not," said Mitar, "for, as Srdič himself will tell you, she won't go within ten miles of him."

The old man was not used to being answered back. He decided to clinch the matter.

"Well, my son, whatever you are doing, you have got to stop it."

But Mitar was by no means cowed. He explained, gently and respectfully, that he had no intention of stopping it.

The old man was overcome by amazement.

"Then, what *do* you intend to do?"

That was the one question Mitar could not easily answer. But in a flash he made up his mind:

"I intend to marry her!"

"But"—the bishop gasped—"she is married already!"

"True," said Mitar gently, "she has been married according to the rites of the Church: but according to the Constitution of January last, it is only the civil ceremony which is valid in law: and the civil ceremony had not, in this case, yet taken place. I shall depart with her to Belgrade, and marry her in a registry office!"

The bishop shook with rage.

"But do you imagine that such a crime would be tolerated? Do you think, when the law was framed, it was ever thought such a situation would arise?—It was simply to ensure the proper registration of marriages, impossible otherwise in a State where there are so many religions—Why, it is an insult to Mother Church, a downright insult, sir!"

Mitar leant back, and his expression was certainly insulting.

"Yes," he said, "I am afraid it will be a little awkward for Mother Church. What will she do about it?"

"You would be excommunicated . . . but the crime cannot be allowed to be committed!"

"I am not much worried by the prospect of excommunication, and I certainly intend to carry out my proposition as soon as I can get three days' leave. I repeat, what will Mother Church do about it?"

And then, before the bishop could reply, Mitar leant forward and continued:

"There is only *one* thing she can do, if the so-called insult is to be avoided: you must annul the former marriage! Find out that you made a mistake, that Natya was never properly married to Srdič at all! Then she and I can be married by Church and State both: and no insult, no awkward precedent, will have occurred."

Without a word the bishop rose and left the room. For nine sleepless nights he tried to discover a way out . . . degenerate days, indeed, when morality, etiquette, even the Church, could be openly defied!

He found none. The only thing that he found was a flaw in the ceremony that he had himself conducted. He had to break it to Srdič that he and Natya had never been properly married at all.

At which the good banker heaved a sigh of relief: for now he was free of the whole affair—unless the pig-headed old Perunič should take it into his head to shoot him for living with his daughter when they were not properly married!

On the whole, it seemed best to avoid all complications by returning at once to Zagreb.

And so the last obstacle was down, and the romantic story of Natya and Mitar, which already had begun to circulate through the market-places in the mouths of ballad-singers and story-tellers, ended at the altar, to which Natya was led

for the second time in a month. Compared with it, the stories of Paris and Helen or of Hero and Leander paled: it was told and sung with such a wealth of detail, such fervour, such gallantry, such romance, such bravery, such exaltation of the divine spirit of love, as never were heard in any story before: in short, it was told exactly as Natya herself believed it all to have happened: and as I should have believed it to have happened, if the story had been told me by Natya herself or even by some outsider—by anyone except Mitar Lochinvárovič himself, in the little Trieste wine-shop, when he was too drunk to remember to be discreet.

But the tragic ending? The shattering of all poor little Natya's dreams and illusions? The perpetual exasperation of Mitar, forced to pretend love in the glare of publicity to a woman for whom he did not care two pins? The horror of an innocent girl, when she discovered what manner of man he was?

I have said that the ways of love are inscrutable: that no man can prophesy them. Mitar, whose heart had remained hard when he had every reason to love Natya, was no sooner married to her, no sooner had every reason to hate and loathe her, then he saw her (as he put it) with clear eyes for the first time—in other words, fell as madly in love with her as she had with him. I cannot explain it, I can only state it. They had three children, to whom Mitar proved a devoted father: when he was forced for financial reasons to leave home, he carried the photograph taken of her on that memorable occasion in Zdenka's studio everywhere he went: and all the time he and I were together, he never failed to write to her at least once a day—this, after they had been married for over five years.

It only shows how important it is, once one has set one's hand to the plough, never to look back on any excuse whatever.



## HONORÉ DE BALZAC

*Farenell*

Honoré de Balzac was one of the most vigorous and prolific French writers of the last century, producing in twenty years eighty-five novels as well as innumerable shorter pieces, which he designed to be woven into one mighty whole under the title of "The Human Comedy." As a creative genius he may well be compared with Shakespeare.



## FAREWELL

“COME, Deputy of the Centre, come along! We shall have to mend our pace if we mean to sit down to dinner when every one else does, and that’s a fact! Hurry up! Jump, Marquis! That’s it! Well done! You are bounding over the furrows just like a stag!”

These words were uttered by a sportsman seated much at his ease on the outskirts of the Forêt de l’Isle-Adam; he had just finished a Havannah cigar, which he had smoked while he waited for his companion, who had evidently been straying about for some time among the forest undergrowth. Four panting dogs by the speaker’s side likewise watched the progress of the personage for whose benefit the remarks were made. To make their sarcastic import fully clear, it should be added that the second sportsman was both short and stout; his ample girth indicated a truly magisterial corpulence, and in consequence his progress across the furrows was by no means easy. He was striding over a vast field of stubble; the dried corn-stalks underfoot added not a little to the difficulties of his passage, and to add to his discomforts, the genial influence of the sun that slanted into his eyes brought great drops of perspiration into his face. The uppermost thought in his mind being a strong desire to keep his balance, he lurched to and fro much like a coach jolted over an atrocious road.

It was one of those September days of almost tropical heat that finishes the work of summer and ripens the grapes. Such heat forebodes a coming storm; and though as yet there were wide patches of blue between the dark rain-clouds low down on the horizon, pale golden masses were rising and scattering with ominous swiftness from west to east, and drawing a shadowy veil across the sky. The wind was still, save in the upper regions of the air, so that the weight



of the atmosphere seemed to compress the steamy heat of the earth into the forest glades. The tall forest trees shut out every breath of air so completely that the little valley across which the sportsman was making his way was as hot as a furnace; the silent forest seemed parched with the fiery heat. Birds and insects were mute; the topmost twigs of the trees swayed with scarcely perceptible motion. Any one who retains some recollection of the summer of 1819 must surely compassionate the plight of the hapless supporter of the ministry who toiled and sweated over the stubble to rejoin his satirical comrade. That gentleman, as he smoked his cigar, had arrived, by a process of calculation based on the altitude of the sun, to the conclusion that it must be about five o'clock.

"Where the devil are we?" asked the stout sportsman. He wiped his brow as he spoke, and propped himself against a tree in the field opposite his companion, feeling quite unequal to clearing the broad ditch that lay between them.

"And you ask that question of *me*!" retorted the other, laughing from his bed of tall brown grasses on the top of the bank. He flung the end of his cigar into the ditch, exclaiming, "I swear by Saint Hubert that no one shall catch *me* risking myself again in a country that I don't know with a magistrate, even if, like you, my dear d'Albon, he happens to be an old schoolfellow."

"Why, Philip, have you really forgotten your own language? You surely must have left your wits behind you in Siberia," said the stouter of the two, with a glance half-comic, half-pathetic at a guide-post distant about a hundred paces from them.

"I understand," replied the one addressed as Philip. He snatched up his rifle, suddenly sprang to his feet, made but one jump of it into the field, and rushed off to the guide-post. "This way, d'Albon, here you are! left about!" he shouted, gesticulating in the direction of the high-road. "*To Baillet and l'Isle-Adam!*" he went on; "so if we go along here, we shall be sure to come upon the cross-road to Cassan."

"Quite right, Colonel," said M. d'Albon, putting the cap with which he had been fanning himself back on his head.

"Then *forward!* highly respected Councillor," returned Colonel Philip, whistling to the dogs, that seemed already to obey him rather than the magistrate their master.

"Are you aware, my lord Marquis, that two leagues yet remain before us?" inquired the malicious soldier. "That village down yonder must be Baillet."

"Great heavens!" cried the Marquis d'Albon. "Go on to Cassan by all means, if you like; but if you do, you will go alone. I prefer to wait here, storm or no storm; you can send a horse for me from the château. You have been making game of me Sucy. We were to have a nice day's sport by ourselves; we were not to go very far from Cassan, and go over ground that I knew. Pooh! Instead of a day's fun, you have kept me running like a greyhound since four o'clock this morning, and nothing but a cup or two of milk by way of breakfast. Oh! if ever you find yourself in a court of law, I will take care that the day goes against you, if you were in the right a hundred times over."

The dejected sportsman sat himself down on one of the stumps at the foot of the guide-post, disencumbered himself of his rifle and empty game-bag, and heaved a prolonged sigh.

"Oh, France, behold thy Deputies!" laughed Colonel de Sucy. "Poor old d'Albon; if you had spent six months at the other end of Siberia as I did . . ."

He broke off, and his eyes sought the sky, as if the story of his troubles was a secret between himself and God.

"Come, march!" he added. "If you once sit down, it is all over with you."

"I can't help it, Philip! It is such an old habit in a magistrate! I am dead beat, upon my honour. If I had only bagged one hare though!"

Two men more different are seldom seen together. The civilian, a man of forty-two, seemed scarcely more than thirty; while the soldier, at thirty years of age, looked to be forty at the least. Both wore the red rosette that proclaimed them to be officers of the Legion of Honour. A few locks of hair, mingled white and black, like a magpie's wing, had strayed from beneath the Colonel's cap; while thick, fair curls clustered about the magistrate's temples. The Colonel was tall, spare, dried up, but muscular; the lines in his pale face told a tale of vehement passions or of terrible sorrows; but his comrade's jolly countenance beamed with health, and would have done credit to an Epicurean. Both men were deeply sunburnt. Their high gaiters of brown leather carried

souvenirs of every ditch and swamp that they crossed that day.

"Come, come," cried M. de Sucy, "forward! One short hour's march, and we shall be at Cassan with a good dinner before us."

"You never were in love, that is positive," returned the Councillor, with a comically piteous expression. "You are as inexorable as Article 304 of the Penal Code!"

Philip de Sucy shuddered violently. Deep lines appeared in his broad forehead, his face was overcast like the sky above them; but though his features seemed to contract with the pain of an intolerably bitter memory, no tears came to his eyes. Like all men of strong character, he possessed the power of forcing his emotions down into some inner depth, and, perhaps, like many reserved natures, he shrank from laying bare a wound too deep for any words of human speech, and winced at the thought of ridicule from those who do not care to understand. M. d'Albon was one of those who are keenly sensitive by nature to the distress of others, who feel at once the pain they have unwittingly given by some blunder. He respected his friend's mood, rose to his feet, forgot his weariness, and followed in silence, thoroughly annoyed with himself for having touched on a wound that seemed not yet healed.

"Someday I will tell you my story," Philip said at last, wringing his friend's hand, while he acknowledged his dumb repentance with a heartrending glance. "To-day, I cannot."

They walked on in silence. As the Colonel's distress passed off the Councillor's fatigue returned. Instinctively, or rather urged by weariness, his eyes explored the depths of the forest around them; he looked high and low among the trees, and gazed along the avenues, hoping to discover some dwelling where he might ask for hospitality. They reached a place where several roads met; and the Councillor, fancying that he saw a thin film of smoke rising through the trees, made a stand and looked sharply about him. He caught a glimpse of the dark green branches of some firs among the other forest trees, and finally, "A house! a house!" he shouted. No sailor could have raised the cry of "Land a-head!" more joyfully than he.

He plunged at once into undergrowth, somewhat of the thickest; and the Colonel, who had fallen into deep musings, followed him unheedingly.

"I would rather have an omelette here and home-made bread, and a chair to sit down in, than go further for a sofa, truffles, and Bordeaux wine at Cassan."

This outburst of enthusiasm on the Councillor's part was caused by the sight of the whitened wall of a house in the distance, standing out in strong contrast against the brown masses of knotted tree-trunks in the forest.

"Aha! This used to be a priory, I should say," the Marquis d'Albon cried once more, as they stood before a grim old gateway. Through the grating they could see the house itself standing in the midst of some considerable extent of park land; from the style of the architecture it appeared to have been a monastery once upon a time.

"Those knowing rascals of monks knew how to choose a site!"

This last exclamation was caused by the magistrate's amazement at the romantic hermitage before his eyes. The house had been built on a spot half-way up the hillside on the slope below the village of Nerville, which crowned the summit. A huge circle of great oak-trees, hundreds of years old, guarded the solitary place from intrusion. There appeared to be about forty acres of the park. The main building of the monastery faced the south, and stood in a space of green meadow, picturesquely intersected by several tiny clear streams, and by larger sheets of water so disposed as to have a natural effect. Shapely trees with contrasting foliage grew here and there. Grottos had been ingeniously contrived; and broad terraced walks, now in ruin, though the steps were broken and the balustrades eaten through with rust, gave to this sylvan Thebaid a certain character of its own. The art of man and the picturesqueness of nature had wrought together to produce a charming effect. Human passions surely could not cross that boundary of tall oak-trees which shut out the sounds of the outer world, and screened the fierce heat of the sun from this forest sanctuary.

"What neglect!" said M. d'Albon to himself, after the first sense of delight in the melancholy aspect of the ruins in the landscape, which seemed blighted by a curse.

It was like some haunted spot, shunned of men. The twisted ivy stems clambered everywhere, hiding everything away beneath a luxuriant green mantle. Moss and lichens, brown and grey, yellow and red, covered the trees with

fantastic patches of colour, grew upon the benches in the garden, overran the roof and the walls of the house. The window-sashes were weather-worn and warped with age, the balconies were dropping to pieces, the terraces in ruins. Here and there the folding shutters hung by a single hinge. The crazy doors would have given way at the first attempt to force an entrance.

Out in the orchard the neglected fruit-trees were running to wood, the rambling branches bore no fruit save the glistening mistletoe berries, and tall plants were growing in the garden walks. All this forlornness shed a charm across the picture that wrought on the spectator's mind with an influence like that of some enchanting poem, filling his soul with dreamy fancies. A poet must have lingered there in deep and melancholy musings, marvelling at the harmony of this wilderness, where decay had a certain grace of its own.

In a moment a few gleams of sunlight struggled through a rift in the clouds, and a shower of coloured light fell over the wild garden. The brown tiles of the roof glowed in the light, the mosses took bright hues, strange shadows played over the grass beneath the trees; the dead autumn tints grew vivid, bright unexpected contrasts were evoked by the light, every leaf stood out sharply in the clear, thin air. Then all at once the sunlight died away, and the landscape that seemed to have spoken grew silent and gloomy again, or rather, it took grey soft tones like the tenderest hues of autumn dusk.

"It is the palace of the Sleeping Beauty," the Councillor said to himself (he had already begun to look at the place from the point of view of an owner of property). "Whom can the place belong to, I wonder. He must be a great fool not to live on such a charming little estate!"

Just at that moment, a woman sprang out from under a walnut tree on the right-hand side of the gateway, and passed before the Councillor as noiselessly and swiftly as the shadow of a cloud. This apparition struck him dumb with amazement.

"Hallo, d'Albon, what is the matter?" asked the Colonel.

"I am rubbing my eyes to find out whether I am awake or asleep," answered the magistrate, whose countenance was pressed against the grating in the hope of catching a second glimpse of the ghost.

"In all probability she is under that fig-tree," he went

on, indicating, for Philip's benefit, some branches that overtopped the wall on the left-hand side of the gateway.

"She? Who?"

"Eh! how should I know?" answered M. d'Albon. "A strange-looking woman sprang up there under my very eyes just now," he added, in a low voice; "she looked to me more like a ghost than a living being. She was so slender, light, and shadowy that she might be transparent. Her face was as white as milk, her hair, her eyes, and her dress were black. She gave me a glance as she flitted by. I am not easily frightened, but that cold stony stare of hers froze the blood in my veins."

"Was she pretty?" inquired Philip.

"I don't know. I saw nothing but those eyes in her head."

"The devil take dinner at Cassan!" exclaimed the Colonel; "let us stay here. I am as eager as a boy to see the inside of this queer place. The window-sashes are painted red, do you see? There is a red line round the panels of the doors and the edges of the shutters. It might be the devil's own dwelling; perhaps he took it over when the monks went out. Now, then, let us give chase to the black and white lady; come along!" cried Philip, with forced gaiety.

He had scarcely finished speaking when the two sportsmen heard a cry as if some bird had been taken in a snare. They listened. There was a sound like the murmur of rippling water, as something forced its way through the bushes; but diligently as they lent their ears, there was no footfall on the path, the earth kept the secret of the mysterious woman's passage, if indeed she had moved from her hiding-place.

"This is very strange!" cried Philip.

Following the wall of the park, the two friends reached before long a forest road leading to the village of Chauvry; they went along this track in the direction of the highway to Paris, and reached another large gateway. Through the railings they had a complete view of the façade of the mysterious house. From this point of view, the dilapidation was still more apparent. Huge cracks had riven the walls of the main body of the house built round three sides of a square. Evidently the place was allowed to fall to ruin; there were holes in the roof, broken slates and tiles lay about below. Fallen fruit from the orchard trees was left to rot on the ground; a cow was grazing over the bowling-green and

trampling the flowers in the garden beds ; a goat browsed on the green grapes and young vine-shoots on the trellis.

"It is all of a piece," remarked the Colonel. "The neglect is in a fashion systematic." He laid his hand on the chain of the bell-pull, but the bell had lost its clapper. The two friends heard no sound save the peculiar grating creak of the rusty spring. A little door in the wall beside the gateway, though ruinous, held good against all their efforts to force it open.

"Oho ! all this is growing very interesting," Philip said to his companion.

"If I were not a magistrate," returned M. d'Albon, "I should think that the woman in black is a witch."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the cow came up to the railings and held out her warm damp nose, as if she were glad of human society. Then a woman, if so indescribable a being could be called a woman, sprang up from the bushes, and pulled at the cord about the cow's neck. From beneath the crimson handkerchief about the woman's head, fair matted hair escaped, something as tow hangs about a spindle. She wore no kerchief at the throat. A coarse black-and-grey striped woollen petticoat, too short by several inches, left her legs bare. She might have belonged to some tribe of Redskins in Fenimore Cooper's novels ; for her neck, arms, and ankles looked as if they had been painted brick-red. There was no spark of intelligence in her featureless face ; her pale, bluish eyes looked out dull and expressionless from beneath the eyebrows with one or two straggling white hairs on them. Her teeth were prominent and uneven, but white as a dog's.

"Hallo, good woman," called M. de Sacy.

She came slowly up to the railing, and stared at the two sportsmen with a contorted smile painful to see.

"Where are we ? What is the name of the house yonder ? Whom does it belong to ? Who are you ? Do you come from hereabouts ?"

To these questions, and to a host of others poured out in succession upon her by the two friends, she made no answer save gurgling noises in the throat, more like animal sounds than anything uttered by a human voice.

"Don't you see that she is deaf and dumb ?" said M. d'Albon.

"*Minorites !*" the peasant woman said at last.

"Ah! she is right. The house looks as though it might once have been a Minorite convent," he went on.

Again they plied the peasant woman with questions, but, like a wayward child, she coloured up, fidgeted with her sabot, twisted the rope by which she held the cow that had fallen to grazing again, stared at the sportsmen, and scrutinised every article of clothing upon them; she gibbered, grunted, and clucked, but no articulate word did she utter.

"Your name?" asked Philip, fixing her with his eyes as if he were trying to bewitch the woman.

"Geneviève," she answered, with an empty laugh.

"The cow is the most intelligent creature we have seen so far," exclaimed the magistrate. "I shall fire a shot, that ought to bring somebody out."

D'Albon had just taken up his rifle when the Colonel put out a hand to stop him, and pointed out the mysterious woman who had aroused such lively curiosity in them. She seemed to be absorbed in deep thought, as she went along a green alley some little distance away, so slowly that the friends had time to take a good look at her. She wore a threadbare black satin gown, her long hair curled thickly over her forehead, and fell like a shawl about her shoulders below her waist. Doubtless she was accustomed to the dishevelment of her locks, for she seldom put back the hair on either side of her brows; but when she did so, she shook her head with a sudden jerk that had not to be repeated to shake away the thick veil from her eyes or forehead. In everything that she did, moreover, there was a wonderful certainty in the working of the mechanism, an unerring swiftness and precision, like that of an animal, well nigh marvellous in a woman.

The two sportsmen were amazed to see her spring up into an apple-tree and cling to a bough lightly as a bird. She snatched at the fruit, ate it, and dropped to the ground with the same supple grace that charms us in a squirrel. The elasticity of her limbs took all appearance of awkwardness or effort from her movements. She played about upon the grass, rolling in it as a young child might have done; then, on a sudden, she lay still and stretched out her feet and hands, with the languid natural grace of a kitten dozing in the sun.

There was a threatening growl of thunder far away, and at this she started up on all fours and listened, like a dog



who hears a strange footstep. One result of this strange attitude was to separate her thick black hair into two masses, that fell away on either side of her face and left her shoulders bare; the two witnesses of this singular scene wondered at the whiteness of the skin that shone like a meadow daisy, and at the neck that indicated the perfection of the rest of her form.

A wailing cry broke from her; she rose to her feet, and stood upright. Every successive movement was made so lightly, so gracefully, so easily, that she seemed to be no human being, but one of Ossian's maids of the mist. She went across the grass to one of the pools of water, deftly shook off her shoe, and seemed to enjoy dipping her foot, white as marble, in the spring; doubtless it pleased her to make the circling ripples, and watch them glitter like gems. She knelt down by the brink, and played there like a child, dabbling her long tresses in the water, and flinging them loose again to see the water drip from the ends, like a string of pearls in the sunless light.

"She is mad!" cried the Councillor.

A hoarse cry rang through the air; it came from Geneviève, and seemed to be meant for the mysterious woman. She rose to her feet in a moment, flinging back the hair from her face, and then the Colonel and d'Albon could see her features distinctly. As soon as she saw the two friends she bounded to the railings with the swiftness of a fawn.

"*Farewell!*" she said in low, musical tones, but they could not discover the least trace of feeling, the least idea in the sweet sounds that they had awaited impatiently.

M. d'Albon admired the long lashes, the thick, dark eyebrows, the dazzling fairness of a skin untinged by any trace of red. Only the delicate blue veins contrasted with that uniform whiteness.

But when the Marquis turned to communicate his surprise at the sight of so strange an apparition, he saw the Colonel stretched on the grass like one dead. M. d'Albon fired his gun into the air, shouted for help, and tried to raise his friend. At the sound of the shot, the strange lady, who had stood motionless by the gate, fled away, crying out like a wounded wild creature, circling round and round in the meadow, with every sign of unspeakable terror.

M. d'Albon heard a carriage rolling along the road to

l'Isle-Adam, and waved his handkerchief to implore help. The carriage immediately came towards the Minorite convent, and M. d'Albon recognised neighbours, M. de and Mme. de Grandville, who hastened to alight and put their carriage at his disposal. Colonel de Sucey inhaled the salts which Mme. de Grandville happened to have with her; he opened his eyes, looked towards the mysterious figure that still fled wailing through the meadow, and a faint cry of horror broke from him; he closed his eyes again, with a dumb gesture of entreaty to his friends to take him away from this scene. M. and Mme. de Grandville begged the Councillor to make use of their carriage, adding very obligingly that they themselves would walk.

"Who can the lady be?" inquired the magistrate, looking towards the strange figure.

"People think that she comes from Moulins," answered M. de Grandville. "She is a Comtesse de Vandières; she is said to be mad; but as she has only been here for two months, I cannot vouch for the truth of all this hearsay talk."

M. d'Albon thanked M. and Mme. de Grandville, and they set out for Cassan.

"It is she!" cried Philip, coming to himself.

"She! who?" asked d'Albon.

"Stéphanie. . . Ah! dead and yet living still; still alive but her mind is gone! I thought the sight would kill me."

The prudent magistrate, recognising the gravity of the crisis through which his friend was passing, refrained from asking questions or exciting him further, and grew impatient of the length of the way to the château, for the change wrought in the Colonel's face alarmed him. He feared lest the Countess's terrible disease had communicated itself to Philip's brain. When they reached the avenue at l'Isle-Adam, d'Albon sent the servant for the local doctor, so that the Colonel had scarcely been laid in bed before the surgeon was beside him.

"If Monsieur le Colonel had not been fasting, the shock must have killed him," pronounced the leech. "He was overtired, and that saved him," and with a few directions as to the patient's treatment, he went to prepare a composing draught himself. M. de Sucey was better the next morning, but the doctor had insisted on sitting up all night with him.

"I confess, Monsieur le Marquis," the surgeon said, "that I feared for the brain. M. de Sucey has had some very violent

shock ; he is a man of strong passions, but, with his temperament, the first shock decides everything. He will very likely be out of danger to-morrow."

The doctor was perfectly right. The next day the patient was allowed to see his friend.

"I want you to do something for me, dear d'Albon," Philip said, grasping his friend's hand. "Hasten at once to the Minorite convent, find out everything about the lady whom we saw there, and come back as soon as you can ; I shall count the minutes till I see you again."

M. d'Albon called for his horse, and galloped over to the old monastery. When he reached the gateway he found some one standing there, a tall, spare man with a kindly face, who answered in the affirmative when he was asked if he lived in the ruined house. M. d'Albon explained his errand.

"Why, then, it must have been you, sir, who fired that unlucky shot ! You all but killed my poor invalid."

"Eh ! I fired into the air !"

"If you had actually hit Madame la Comtesse, you would have done less harm to her."

"Well, well, then, we can neither of us complain, for the sight of the Countess all but killed my friend, M. de Sacy."

"The Baron de Sacy, is it possible ?" cried the doctor, clasping his hands. "Has he been in Russia ? was he in the Beresina ?"

"Yes," answered d'Albon. "He was taken prisoner by the Cossacks and sent to Siberia. He had not been back in this country a twelvemonth."

"Come in, Monsieur," said the other, and he led the way to a drawing-room on the ground-floor. Everything in the room showed signs of capricious destruction.

Valuable china jars lay in fragments on either side of a clock beneath a glass shade, which had escaped. The silk hanging about the windows were torn to rags, while the muslin curtains were untouched.

"You see about you the havoc wrought by a charming being to whom I have dedicated my life. She is my niece ; and though medical science is powerless in her case, I hope to restore her to reason, though the method which I am trying is, unluckily, only possible to the wealthy."

Then, like all who live much alone and daily bear the burden of a heavy trouble, he fell to talk with the magistrater. This is the story that he told, set in order, and with the many digressions made by both teller and hearer omitted.

. . . . .

When, at nine o'clock at night, on the 28th of November, 1812, Marshal Victor abandoned the heights of Studzianka, which he had held through the day, he left a thousand men behind with instructions to protect, till the last possible moment, the two pontoon bridges over the Beresina that still held good. This rearguard was to save if possible an appalling number of stragglers, so numbed with the cold, that they obstinately refused to leave the baggage-waggons. The heroism of the generous band was doomed to fail; for, unluckily, the men who poured down to the eastern bank of the Beresina found carriages, caissons, and all kinds of property which the Army had been forced to abandon during its passage on the 27th and 28th days of November. The poor, half-frozen wretches, sunk almost to the level of brutes, finding such un hoped-for riches, bivouacked in the deserted space, laid hands on the military stores, improvised huts out of the material, lighted fires with anything that would burn, cut up the carcasses of the horses for food, tore out the linings of the carriages, wrapped themselves in them, and lay down to sleep, instead of crossing the Beresina in peace under cover of night—the Beresina that even then had proved, by an incredible fatality, so disastrous to the Army. Such apathy on the part of the poor fellows can only be understood by those who remember tramping across those vast deserts of snow, with nothing to quench their thirst but snow, snow for their bed, snow as far as the horizon on every side, and no food but snow, a little frozen beetroot, horse-flesh, or a handful of meal.

The miserable creatures were dropping down, overcome by hunger, thirst, weariness, and sleep, when they reached the shores of the Beresina and found fuel and fire and victuals, countless waggons and tents, a whole improvised town, in short. The whole village of Studzianka had been removed piecemeal from the heights to the plain, and the very perils and miseries of this dangerous and doleful habitation smiled invitingly to the wayfarers, who beheld no prospect beyond

it but the awful Russian deserts. A huge hospice, in short, was erected for twenty hours of existence. Only one thought—the thought of rest—appealed to men weary of life or rejoicing in unlooked-for comfort.

They lay right in the line of fire from the cannon of the Russian left; but to that vast mass of human creatures, a patch upon the snow, sometimes dark, sometimes breaking into flame, the indefatigable grape-shot was but one discomfort the more. For them it was only a storm, and they paid the less attention to the bolts that fell among them because there were none to strike down there save dying men, the wounded, or perhaps the dead. Stragglers came up in little bands at every moment. These walking corpses instantly separated, and wandered begging from fire to fire; and meeting, for the most part, with refusals, banded themselves together again, and took by force what they could not otherwise obtain. They were deaf to the voices of their officers prophesying death on the morrow, and spent the energy required to cross the swamp in building shelters for the night and preparing a meal that often proved fatal. The coming death no longer seemed an evil, for it gave them an hour of slumber before it came. Hunger and thirst and cold—these were evils, but not death.

At last wood and fuel and canvas and shelters failed, and hideous brawls began between destitute late comers and the rich already in possession of a lodging. The weaker were driven away, until a few last fugitives before the Russian advance were obliged to make their bed in the snow, and lay down to rise no more.

Little by little the mass of half-dead humanity became so dense, so deaf, so torpid—or perhaps it should be said so happy—that Marshal Victor, their heroic defender against twenty thousand Russians under Wittgenstein, was actually compelled to cut his way by force through this forest of men, so as to cross the Beresina with the five thousand heroes whom he was leading to the Emperor. The miserable creatures preferred to be trampled and crushed to death rather than stir from their places, and died without a sound, smiling at the dead ashes of their fires, forgetful of France.

Not before ten o'clock that night did the Duc de Belluno reach the other side of the river. Before committing his men to the pontoon bridges that led to Zembin, he left the

fate of the rearguard at Studzianka in Eblé's hands, and to Eblé the survivors of the calamities of the Beresina owed their lives.

About midnight, the great General, followed by a courageous officer, came out of his little hut by the bridge, and gazed at the spectacle of this camp between the bank of the Beresina and the Borizof road to Studzianka. The thunder of the Russian cannonade had ceased. Here and there faces that had nothing human about them were lighted up by countless fires that seemed to grow pale in the glare of the snowfields, and to give no light. Nearly thirty thousand wretches, belonging to every nation that Napoleon had hurled upon Russia, lay there hazarding their lives with the indifference of brute beasts.

"We have all these to save," the General said to his subordinate. "To-morrow morning the Russians will be in Studzianka. The moment they come up we shall have to set fire to the bridge; so pluck up heart, my boy! Make your way out and up yonder through them and tell General Fournier that he has barely time to evacuate his post and cut his way through to the bridge. As soon as you have seen him set out, follow him down, take some able-bodied men, and set fire to the tents, waggons, caissons, carriages, anything and everything, without pity, and drive these fellows on to the bridge. Compel everything that walks on two legs to take refuge on the other bank. We must set fire to the camp; it is our last resource. If Berthier had let me burn those d——d waggons sooner, no lives need have been lost in the river except my poor pontooners, my fifty heroes, who saved the Army, and will be forgotten."

The General passed his hand over his forehead and said no more. He felt that Poland would be his tomb, and foresaw that afterwards no voice would be raised to speak for the noble fellows who had plunged into the stream—into the waters of the Beresina!—to drive in the piles for the bridges. And, indeed, only one of them is living now, or, to be more accurate, starving, utterly forgotten in a country village! The brave officer had scarcely gone a hundred paces towards Studzianka, when General Eblé roused some of his patient pontooners, and began his work of mercy by setting fire to the camp on the side nearest the bridge, so compelling the sleepers to rise and cross the Beresina. Meanwhile the

young aide-de-camp, not without difficulty, reached the one wooden house yet left standing in Studzianka.

"So the box is pretty full, is it, messmate?" he said to a man whom he found outside.

"You will be a knowing fellow if you manage to get inside," the officer returned, without turning round or stopping his occupation of hacking at the woodwork of the house with his sabre.

"Philip, is that you?" cried the aide-de-camp, recognising the voice of one of his friends.

"Yes. Aha! is it you, old fellow?" returned M. de Sucy, looking round at the aide-de-camp, who like himself was not more than twenty-three years old. "I fancied you were on the other side of this confounded river. Do you come to bring us sweetmeats for dessert? You will get a warm welcome," he added, as he tore away a strip of bark from the wood and gave it to his horse by way of fodder.

"I am looking for your Commandant. General Eblé has sent me to tell him to file off to Zemblin. You have only just time to cut your way through that mass of dead men; as soon as you get through, I am going to set fire to the place to make them move——"

"You almost make me feel warm! Your news has put me in a fever; I have two friends to bring through. Ah! but for those marmots, I should have been dead before now, old fellow. On their account I am taking care of my horse instead of eating him. But have you a crust about you, for pity's sake? It is thirty hours since I have stowed any victuals. I have been fighting like a madman to keep up a little warmth in my body and what courage I have left."

"Poor Philip! I have nothing—not a scrap!—But is your General in there?"

"Don't attempt to go in. The barn is full of our wounded. Go up a bit higher, and you will see a sort of pigsty to the right—that is where the General is. Good-bye, my dear fellow. If ever we meet again in a quadrille in a ballroom in Paris——"

He did not finish the sentence, for the treachery of the north-east wind that whistled about them froze Major Philip's lips, and the aide-de-camp kept moving for fear of being frost-bitten. Silence soon prevailed, scarcely broken by the groans

of the wounded in the barn, or the stifled sounds made by M. de Sacy's horse crunching the frozen bark with famished eagerness. Philip thrust his sabre into the sheath, caught at the bridle of the precious animal that he had managed to keep for so long, and drew her away from the miserable fodder that she was bolting with apparent relish.

"Come along, Bichette! come along! It lies with you now, my beauty, to save Stéphanie's life. There, wait a little longer, and they will let us lie down and die, no doubt;" and Philip, wrapped in a pelisse, to which doubtless he owed his life and energies, began to run, stamping his feet on the frozen snow to keep them warm. He was scarce five hundred paces away before he saw a great fire blazing on the spot where he had left his carriage that morning with an old soldier to guard it. A dreadful misgiving seized upon him. Many a man under the influence of a powerful feeling during the Retreat summoned up energy for his friend's sake when he would not have exerted himself to save his own life; so it was with Philip. He soon neared a hollow, where he had left a carriage sheltered from the cannonade, a carriage that held a young woman, his playmate in childhood, dearer to him than any one else on earth.

Some thirty stragglers were sitting round a tremendous blaze, which they kept up with logs of wood, planks wrenched from the floors of the caissons, and wheels, and panels from carriage bodies. These had been, doubtless, among the last to join the sea of fires, huts, and human faces that filled the great furrow in the land between Studzianka and the fatal river, a restless living sea of almost imperceptibly moving figures, that sent up a smothered hum of sound blended with frightful shrieks. It seemed that hunger and despair had driven these forlorn creatures to take forcible possession of the carriage, for the old General and his young wife, whom they had found warmly wrapped in pelisses and travelling cloaks, were now crouching on the earth beside the fire, and one of the carriage doors was broken.

As soon as the group of stragglers round the fire heard the footfall of the Major's horse, a frenzied yell of hunger went up from them. "A horse!" they cried. "A horse!"

All the voices went up as one voice.

"Back! back! Look out!" shouted two or three of them, levelling their muskets at the animal.



"I will pitch you neck and crop into your fire, you blackguards!" cried Philip, springing in front of the mare. "There are dead horses lying up yonder; go and look for them!"

"What a rum customer the officer is!—Once, twice, will you get out of the way?" returned a giant grenadier. "You won't? All right then, just as you please."

A woman's shriek rang out above the report. Luckily, none of the bullets hit Philip; but poor Bichette lay in the agony of death. Three of the men came up and put an end to her with thrusts of the bayonet.

"Cannibals! leave me the rug and my pistols," cried Philip in desperation.

"Oh! the pistols if you like; but as for the rug, there is a fellow yonder who has had nothing to wet his whistle these two days, and is shivering in his coat of cobwebs, and that's our General."

Philip looked up and saw a man with worn-out shoes and a dozen rents in his trousers; the only covering for his head was a ragged foraging cap, white with rime. He said no more after than, but snatched up his pistols.

Five of the men dragged the mare to the fire, and began to cut up the carcase as dexterously as any journeymen butchers in Paris. The scraps of meat were distributed and flung upon the coals, and the whole process was magically swift. Philip went over to the woman who had given the cry of terror when she recognised his danger, and sat down by her side. She sat motionless upon a cushion taken from the carriage, warming herself at the blaze; she said no word, and gazed at him without a smile. He saw beside her the soldier whom he had left mounting guard over the carriage; the poor fellow had been wounded; he had been overpowered by numbers, and forced to surrender to the stragglers who had set upon him, and, like a dog who defends his master's dinner till the last moment, he had taken his share of the spoil, and had made a sort of cloak for himself out of a sheet. At that particular moment he was busy toasting a piece of horseflesh, and in his face the major saw a gleeful anticipation of the coming feast.

The Comte de Vandières, who seemed to have grown quite childish in the last few days, sat on a cushion close to his wife, and stared into the fire. He was only just beginning to shake off his torpor under the influence of the

warmth. He had been no more affected by Philip's arrival and danger than the fight and subsequent pillage of his travelling carriage.

At first Sucy caught the young Countess's hand in his, trying to express his affection for her, and the pain that it gave him to see her reduced like this to the last extremity of misery; but he said nothing as he sat by her side on the thawing heap of snow, he gave himself up to the pleasure of the sensation of warmth, forgetful of danger, forgetful of all things else in the world. In spite of himself his face expanded with an almost fatuous expression of satisfaction, and he waited impatiently till the scrap of horseflesh that had fallen to his soldier's share should be cooked. The smell of the charred flesh stimulated his hunger. Hunger clamoured within him and silenced his heart, his courage, and his love. He coolly looked round on the results of the spoliation of his carriage. Not a man seated round the fire but had shared the booty, the rugs, cushions, pelisses, dresses—articles of clothing that belonged to the Count and Countess or to himself. Philip turned to see if anything worth taking was left in the berline. He saw by the light of the flames, gold, and diamonds, and silver lying scattered about; no one had cared to appropriate the least particle. There was something hideous in the silence among those human creatures round the fire; none of them spoke, none of them stirred, save to do such things as each considered necessary for his own comfort.

It was a grotesque misery. The men's faces were warped and disfigured with the cold, and plastered over with a layer of mud; you could see the thickness of the mask by the channel traced down their cheeks by the tears that ran from their eyes, and their long slovenly kept beards added to the hideousness of their appearance. Some were wrapped round in women's shawls, others in horse-cloths, dirty blankets, rags stiffened with melting hoar-frost; here and there a man wore a boot on one foot and a shoe on the other, in fact, there was not one of them but wore some ludicrously odd costume. But the men themselves with such matter for jest about them were gloomy and taciturn.

The silence was unbroken save by the crackling of the wood, the roaring of the flames, the far-off hum of the camp, and the sound of sabres hacking at the carcass of the mare.

Some of the hungriest of the men were still cutting tit-bits for themselves. A few miserable creatures, more weary than the others, slept outright; and if they happened to roll into the fire, no one pulled them back. With cut-and-dried logic their fellows argued that if they were not dead, a scorching ought to be sufficient warning to quit and seek out more comfortable quarters. If the poor wretch woke to find himself on fire, he was burned to death, and nobody pitied him. Here and there the men exchanged glances, as if to excuse their indifference by the carelessness of the rest; the thing happened twice under the young Countess's eyes, and she uttered no sound. When all the scraps of horse-flesh had been broiled upon the coals, they were devoured with a ravenous greediness that would have been disgusting in wild beasts.

"And now we have seen thirty infantry-men on one horse for the first time in our lives!" cried the grenadier who had shot the mare, the one solitary joke that sustained the Frenchmen's reputation for wit.

Before long the poor fellows huddled themselves up in their clothes, and lay down on planks of timber, on anything but the bare snow, and slept—heedless of the morrow. Major de Sucy having warmed himself and satisfied his hunger, fought in vain against the drowsiness that weighed upon his eyes. During this brief struggle he gazed at the sleeping girl who had turned her face to the fire, so that he could see her closed eyelids and part of her forehead. She was wrapped round in a furred pelisse and a coarse horseman's cloak, her head lay on a blood-stained cushion; a tall astrakhan cap tied over her head, by a handkerchief knotted under the chin protected her face as much as possible from the cold, and she had tucked up her feet in the cloak. As she lay curled up in this fashion, she bore no likeness to any creature.

Was this the lowest of camp-followers? Was this the charming woman, the pride of her lover's heart, the queen of many a Parisian ballroom? Alas! even for the eyes of this most devoted friend, there was no discernible trace of womanhood in that bundle of rags and linen, and the cold was mightier than the love in a woman's heart.

Then for the major the husband and wife came to be like two distant dots seen through the thick veil that the most irresistible kind of slumber spread over his eyes. It all seemed

to be part of a dream—the leaping flames, the recumbent figures, the awful cold that lay in wait for them three paces away from the warmth of the fire that glowed for a little while. One thought that could not be stifled haunted Philip—“If I go to sleep, we shall all die; I will not sleep,” he said to himself.

He slept. After an hour’s slumber M. de Sucy was awakened by a hideous uproar and the sound of an explosion. The remembrance of his duty, of the danger of his beloved, rushed upon his mind with a sudden shock. He uttered a cry like the growl of a wild beast. He and his servant stood upright above the rest. They saw a sea of fire in the darkness, and against it moving masses of human figures. Flames were devouring the huts and tents. Despairing shrieks and yelling cries reached their ears; they saw thousands upon thousands of wild and desperate faces; and through this inferno a column of soldiers was cutting its way to the bridge, between two hedges of dead bodies.

“Our rearguard is in full retreat,” cried the major. “There is no hope left!”

“I have spared your travelling carriage, Philip,” said a friendly voice.

Sucy turned and saw the young aide-de-camp by the light of the flames.

“Oh, it is all over with us,” he answered. “They have eaten my horse. And how am I to make this sleepy general and his wife stir a step?”

“Take a brand, Philip, and threaten them.”

“Threaten the Countess? . . .”

“Good-bye,” cried the aide-de-camp; “I have only just time to get across that unlucky river, and go I must, there is my mother in France! . . . What a night! This herd of wretches would rather lie here in the snow, and most of them would sooner be burned alive than get up. . . . It is four o’clock, Philip! In two hours the Russians will begin to move, and you will see the Beresina covered with corpses a second time, I can tell you. You haven’t a horse, and you cannot carry the Countess, so come along with me,” he went on, taking his friend by the arm.

“My dear fellow, how am I to leave Stéphanie!”

Major de Sucy grasped the Countess, set her on her feet, and shook her roughly; he was in despair. He compelled her to wake, and she stared at him with dull fixed eyes.

"Stéphanie, we must go, or we shall die here!"

For all answer the Countess tried to sink down again and sleep on the earth. The aide-de-camp snatched a brand from the fire and shook it in her face.

"We must save her in spite of herself," cried Philip, and he carried her in his arms to the carriage. He came back to entreat his friend to help him, and the two young men took the old general and put him beside his wife, without knowing whether he were alive or dead. The major rolled the men over as they crouched on the earth, took away the plundered clothing, and heaped it upon the husband and wife, then he flung some of the broiled fragments of horse-flesh into a corner of the carriage.

"Now, what do you mean to do?" asked the aide-de-camp.

"Drag them along!" answered Sucy.

"You are mad!"

"You are right!" exclaimed Philip, folding his arms on his breast.

Suddenly a desperate plan occurred to him.

"Look you here!" he said, grasping his sentinel by the unwounded arm, "I leave her in your care for one hour. Bear in mind that you must die sooner than let any one, no matter whom, come near the carriage!"

The major seized a handful of the lady's diamonds, drew his sabre, and violently battered those who seemed to him to be the bravest among the sleepers. By this means he succeeded in rousing the gigantic grenadier and a couple of men whose rank and regiment were undiscoverable.

"It is all up with us!" he cried.

"Of course it is," returned the grenadier; "but that is all one to me."

"Very well then, if die you must, isn't it better to sell your life for a pretty woman, and stand a chance of going back to France again?"

"I would rather go to sleep," said one of the men, dropping down into the snow; "and if you worry me again, major, I shall stick my toasting-iron into your belly!"

"What is it all about, sir?" asked the grenadier. "The man's drunk. He is a Parisian, and likes to lie in the lap of luxury."

"You shall have these, good fellow," said the major, holding out a *rivière* of diamonds, "if you will follow me

and fight like a madman. The Russians are not ten minutes away; they have horses; we will march up to the nearest battery and carry off two stout ones."

"How about the sentinels, major?"

"One of us three——" he began; then he turned from the soldier and looked at the aide-de-camp.—"You are coming, aren't you, Hippolyte?"

Hippolyte nodded assent.

"One of us," the major went on, "will look after the sentry. Besides, perhaps those blessed Russians are also fast asleep."

"All right, major; you are a good sort! But will you take me in your carriage?" asked the grenadier.

"Yes, if you don't leave your bones up yonder. If I come to grief, promise me, you two, that you will do everything in your power to save the Countess."

"All right," said the grenadier.

They set out for the Russian lines, taking the direction of the batteries that had so cruelly raked the mass of miserable creatures huddled together by the river bank. A few minutes later the hoofs of two galloping horses rang on the frozen snow, and the awakened battery fired a volley that passed over the heads of the sleepers; the hoof-beats rattled so fast on the iron ground that they sounded like the hammering in a smithy. The generous aide-de-camp had fallen; the stalwart grenadier had come off safe and sound; and Philip himself had received a bayonet thrust in the shoulder while defending his friend. Notwithstanding his wound, he clung to his horse's mane, and gripped him with his knees so tightly that the animal was held as in a vice.

"God be praised!" cried the major, when he saw his soldier still on the spot, and the carriage standing where he had left it.

"If you do the right thing by me, sir, you will get me the cross for this. We have treated them to a sword dance and to a pretty tune from the rifle, eh?"

"We have done nothing yet! Let us put the horses in. Take hold of these cords."

"They are not long enough."

"All right, grenadier, just go and overhaul those fellows sleeping there; take their shawls, sheets, anything——"

"I say! the rascal is dead," cried the grenadier, as he

plundered the first man who came to hand. "Why, they are all dead! how queer!"

"All of them?"

"Yes, every one. It looks as though horseflesh *à la neige* was indigestible."

Philip shuddered at the words. The night had grown twice as cold as before.

"Great heaven! to lose her when I have saved her life a score of times already."

He shook the countess, "Stéphanie! Stéphanie!" he cried.

She opened her eyes.

"We are saved, madame!"

"Saved!" she echoed, and fell back again.

The horses were harnessed after a fashion at last. The major held his sabre in his unwounded hand, took the reins in the other, saw to his pistols, and sprang on one of the horses, while the grenadier mounted the other. The old sentinel had been pushed into the carriage, and lay across the knees of the general and the Countess; his feet were frozen. Urged on by blows from the flat of the sabre, the horses dragged the carriage at a mad gallop down to the plain, where endless difficulties awaited them. Before long it became almost impossible to advance without crushing sleeping men, women, and even children at every step, all of whom declined to stir when the grenadier awakened them. In vain M. de Sucy looked for the track that the rearguard had cut through this dense crowd of human beings; there was no more sign of their passage than of the wake of a ship in the sea. The horses could only move at a foot pace, and were stopped most frequently by soldiers, who threatened to kill them.

"Do you mean to get there?" asked the grenadier.

"Yes, if it costs every drop of blood in my body! if it costs the whole world!" the major answered.

"Forward, then! . . . You can't have the omelette without breaking eggs." And the grenadier of the Garde urged on the horses over the prostrate bodies, and upset the bivouacs; the blood-stained wheels ploughing that field of faces left a double furrow of dead. But in justice it should be said that he never ceased to thunder out his warning cry, "Carrión! look out!"

"Poor wretches!" exclaimed the major.

"Bah! That way, or the cold, or the cannon!" said the grenadier, goading on the horses with the point of his sword.

Then came the catastrophe, which must have happened sooner but for miraculous good fortune; the carriage was overturned, and all further progress was stopped at once.

"I expected as much!" exclaimed the imperturbable grenadier. "Oho! he is dead!" he added, looking at his comrade.

"Poor Laurent!" said the major.

"Laurent! Wasn't he in the Fifth Chasseurs?"

"Yes."

"My own cousin.—Pshaw! this beastly life is not so pleasant that one need be sorry for him as things go."

But all this time the carriage lay overturned, and the horses were only released after great and irreparable loss of time. The shock had been so violent that the Countess had been awakened by it, and the subsequent commotion aroused her from her stupor. She shook off the rugs and rose.

"Where are we, Philip?" she asked in musical tones, as she looked about her.

"About five hundred paces from the bridge. We are just about to cross the Beresina. When we are on the other side, Stéphanie, I will not tease you any more; I will let you go to sleep; we shall be in safety, we can go on to Wilna in peace. God grant that you may never know what your life has cost!"

"You are wounded!"

"A mere trifle."

The hour of doom had come. The Russian cannon announced the day. The Russians were in possession of Studzianka, and thence were raking the plain with grape-shot; and by the first dim light of the dawn the major saw two columns moving and forming above on the heights. Then a cry of horror went up from the crowd, and in a moment every one sprang to his feet. Each instinctively felt his danger, and all made a rush for the bridge, surging towards it like a wave.

Then the Russians came down upon them, swift as a conflagration. Men, women, children, and horses all crowded towards the river. Luckily for the major and the Countess, they were still at some distance from the bank. General Eblé had just set fire to the bridge on the other side; but



in spite of all the warnings given to those who rushed towards the chance of salvation, not one among them could or would draw back. The overladen bridge gave way, and not only so, the impetus of the frantic living wave towards that fatal bank was such that a dense crowd of human beings was thrust into the water as if by an avalanche. The sound of a single human cry could not be distinguished; there was a dull crash as if an enormous stone had fallen into the water—and the Beresina was covered with corpses.

The violent recoil of those in front, striving to escape this death, brought them into hideous collision with those behind them, who were pressing towards the bank, and many were suffocated and crushed. The Comte and Comtesse de Vandières owed their lives to the carriage. The horses that had trampled and crushed so many dying men were crushed and trampled to death in their turn by the human maelstrom which eddied from the bank. Sheer physical strength saved the major and the grenadier. They killed others in self-defence. That wild sea of human faces and living bodies, surging to and fro as by one impulse, left the bank of the Beresina clear for a few moments. The multitude had hurled themselves back on the plain. Some few men sprang down from the banks toward the river, not so much with any hope of reaching the opposite shore, which for them meant France, as from dread of the wastes of Siberia. For some bold spirits despair became a panoply. An officer leapt from hummock to hummock of ice, and reached the other shore; one of the soldiers scrambled over miraculously on the piles of dead bodies and drift ice. But the immense multitude left behind saw at last that the Russians would not slaughter twenty thousand unarmed men, too numb with the cold to attempt to resist them, and each awaited his fate with dreadful apathy. By this time the major and his grenadier, the old general and his wife, were left to themselves not very far from the place where the bridge had been. All four stood dry-eyed and silent among the heaps of dead. A few able-bodied men and one or two officers, who had recovered all their energy at this crisis, gathered about them. The group was sufficiently large; there were about fifty men all told. A couple of hundred paces from them stood the wreck of the artillery bridge, which had broken down the day before; the major saw this, and "Let us make a raft!" he cried.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the whole group hurried to the ruins of the bridge. A crowd of men began to pick up iron clamps and to hunt for planks and ropes—for all the materials for a raft, in short. A score of armed men and officers, under command of the major, stood on guard to protect the workers from any desperate attempt on the part of the multitude if they should guess their design. The longing for freedom, which inspires prisoners to accomplish impossibilities, cannot be compared with the hope which lent energy at that moment to these forlorn Frenchmen.

"The Russians are upon us! Here are the Russians!" the guard shouted to the workers.

The timbers creaked, the raft grew larger, stronger, and more substantial. Generals, colonels, and common soldiers all alike bent beneath the weight of waggon-wheels, chains, coils of rope, and planks of timber; it was a modern realisation of the building of Noah's ark. The young Countess, sitting by her husband's side, looked on, regretful that she could do nothing to aid the workers, though she helped to knot the lengths of rope together.

At last the raft was finished. Forty men launched it out into the river, while ten of the soldiers held the ropes that must keep it moored to the shore. The moment that they saw their handiwork floating on the Beresina, they sprang down on to it from the bank with callous selfishness. The major, dreading the frenzy of the first rush, held back Stéphanie and the general; but a shudder ran through him when he saw the landing place black with people, and men crowding down like playgoers into the pit of a theatre.

"It was I who thought of the raft, you savages!" he cried. "I have saved your lives, and you will not make room for me!"

A confused murmur was the only answer. The men at the edge took up stout poles, thrust them against the bank with all their might, so as to shove the raft out and gain an impetus at its starting upon a journey across a sea of floating ice and dead bodies towards the other shore.

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* I will knock some of you off into the water if you don't make room for the major and his two companions," shouted the grenadier. He raised his sabre threateningly, delayed the departure, and made the men stand closer together, in spite of threatening yells.

"I shall fall in! . . . I shall go overboard! . . ." his fellows shouted.

"Let us start! Put off!"

The major gazed with tearless eyes at the woman he loved; an impulse of sublime resignation raised her eyes to heaven.

"To die with you!" she said.

In the situation of the folk upon the raft there was a certain comic element. They might utter hideous yells, but not one of them dared to oppose the grenadier, for they were packed together so tightly that if one man were knocked down, the whole raft might capsize. At this delicate crisis, a captain tried to rid himself of one of his neighbours; the man saw the hostile intention of his officer, collared him, and pitched him overboard. "Aha! The duck has a mind to drink. . . . Over with you!—There is room for two now!" he shouted. "Quick, major! throw your little woman over, and come! Never mind that old dotard; he will drop off to-morrow!"

"Be quick!" cried a voice, made up of a hundred voices.

"Come, major! Those fellows are making a fuss, and well they may!"

The Comte de Vandières flung off his ragged blankets, and stood before them in his general's uniform.

"Let us save the Count," said Philip.

Stéphanie grasped his hand tightly in hers, flung her arms about, and clasped him close in an agonised embrace.

"Farewell," she said.

Then each knew the other's thoughts. The Comte de Vandières recovered his energies and presence of mind sufficiently to jump on to the raft, whither Stéphanie followed him after one last look at Philip.

"Major, won't you take my place? I do not care a straw for life; I have neither wife, nor child, nor mother belonging to me——"

"I give them into your charge," cried the major, indicating the Count and his wife.

"Be easy; I will take as much care of them as of the apple of my eye."

Philip stood stock-still on the bank. The raft sped so violently towards the opposite shore that it ran aground with a violent shock to all on board. The count, standing on the very edge, was shaken into the stream; and as he

fell, a mass of ice swept by and struck off his head, and sent it flying like a ball.

"Hey! major!" shouted the grenadier.

"Farewell!" a woman's voice called aloud.

An icy shiver of dread ran through Philip de Sacy, and he dropped down where he stood, overcome with cold and weariness.

. . . . .

"My poor niece went out of her mind," the doctor added after a brief pause. "Ah! monsieur," he went on, grasping M. d'Albon's hand, "what a fearful life for the poor little thing, so young, so delicate! An unheard-of misfortune separated her from that grenadier of the Garde (Fleuriot by name), and for two years she was dragged on after the army, the laughing-stock of a rabble of outcasts. She went barefoot, I heard, ill-clad, neglected, and starved for months at a time; sometimes confined in a hospital, sometimes living like a hunted animal. God alone knows all the misery which she endured, and yet she lives. She was shut up in a madhouse in a little German town, while her relations, believing her to be dead, were dividing her property here in France.

"In 1816 the grenadier Fleuriot recognised her in an inn in Strasbourg. She had just managed to escape from captivity. Some peasants told him that the Countess had lived for a whole month in a forest, and how that they had tracked her and tried to catch her without success.

"I was at that time not many leagues from Strasbourg; and hearing the talk about this girl in the wood, I wished to verify the strange facts that had given rise to absurd stories. What was my feeling when I beheld the Countess? Fleuriot told me all that he knew of the piteous story. I took the poor fellow with my niece into Auvergne, and there I had the misfortune to lose him. He had some ascendancy over Mme. de Vandières. He alone succeeded in persuading her to wear clothes; and in those days her one word of human speech—*Farewell*—she seldom uttered. Fleuriot set himself to the task of awakening certain associations; but there he failed completely; he drew that one sorrowful word from her a little more frequently, that was all. But the old grenadier could amuse her, and devoted himself to playing with her, and

through him I hoped; but——” here Stéphanie’s uncle broke off. After a moment he went on again.

“Here she has found another creature with whom she seems to have an understanding—an idiot peasant girl, who once, in spite of her plainness and imbecility, fell in love with a mason. The mason thought of marrying her because she had a little bit of land, and for a whole year poor Geneviève was the happiest of living creatures. She dressed in her best, and danced on Sundays with Dallot; she understood love; there was room for love in her heart and brain. But Dallot thought better of it. He found another girl who had all her senses and rather more land than Geneviève, and he forsook Geneviève for her. Then the poor thing lost the little intelligence that love had developed in her; she can do nothing now but cut grass and look after the cattle. My niece and the poor girl are in some sort bound to each other by the invisible chain of their common destiny, and by their madness due to the same cause. Just come here a moment; look!” and Stéphanie’s uncle led the Marquis d’Albon to the window.

There, in fact, the magistrate beheld the pretty Countess sitting on the ground at Geneviève’s knee, while the peasant girl was wholly absorbed in combing out Stéphanie’s long, black hair with a huge comb. The Countess submitted herself to this, uttering low smothered cries that expressed her enjoyment of the sensation of physical comfort. A shudder ran through M. d’Albon as he saw her attitude of languid abandonment, the animal supineness that revealed an utter lack of intelligence.

“Oh! Philip, Philip!” he cried, “past troubles are as nothing. Is it quite hopeless?” he asked.

The doctor raised his eyes to heaven.

“Good-bye, monsieur,” said M. d’Albon, pressing the old man’s hand. “My friend is expecting me; you will see him here before very long.”

“Then it is Stéphanie herself?” cried Sucy when the Marquis had spoken the first few words. “Ah! until now I did not feel sure!” he added. Tears filled the dark eyes that were wont to wear a stern expression.

“Yes, she is the Comtesse de Vandières,” his friend replied.

The colonel started up, and hurriedly began to dress.

"Why, Philip!" cried the horrified magistrate. "Are you going mad?"

"I am quite well now," said the colonel simply. "This news has soothed all my bitterest grief; what pain could hurt me while I think of Stéphanie? I am going over to the Minorite convent, to see her and speak to her, to restore her to health again. She is free; ah, surely, surely, happiness will smile on us, or there is no Providence above. How can you think that she could hear my voice, poor Stéphanie, and not recover her reason?"

"She has seen you once already, and she did not recognise you," the magistrate answered gently, trying to suggest some wholesome fears to this friend, whose hopes were visibly too high.

The colonel shuddered, but he began to smile again, with a slight involuntary gesture of incredulity. Nobody ventured to oppose his plans, and a few hours later he had taken up his abode in the old priory, to be near the doctor and the Comtesse de Vandières.

"Where is she?" he cried at once.

"Hush!" answered M. Fanjat, Stéphanie's uncle. "She is sleeping. Stay; here she is."

Philip saw the poor distraught sleeper crouching on a stone bench in the sun. Her thick hair, straggling over her face, screened it from the glare and heat; her arms dropped languidly to the earth; she lay at ease as gracefully as a fawn, her feet tucked up beneath her; her bosom rose and fell with her even breathing; there was the same transparent whiteness as of porcelain in her skin and complexion that we so often admire in children's faces. Geneviève sat there motionless, holding a spray that Stéphanie doubtless had brought down from the top of one of the tallest poplars; the idiot girl was waving the green branch above her, driving away the flies from her sleeping companion, and gently fanning her.

She stared at M. Fanjat and the colonel as they came up; then, like a dumb animal that recognises its master, she slowly turned her face towards the countess, and watched over her as before, showing not the slightest sign of intelligence or of astonishment. The air was scorching. The glittering particles of the stone bench shone like sparks of fire; the meadow sent up the quivering vapours that hover

above the grass and gleam like golden dust when they catch the light, but Geneviève did not seem to feel the raging heat.

The colonel wrung M. Fanjat's hands; the tears that gathered in the soldier's eyes stole down his cheeks, and fell on the grass at Stéphanie's feet.

"Sir," said her uncle, "for these two years my heart has been broken daily. Before very long you will be as I am; if you do not weep, you will not feel your anguish the less."

"You have taken care of her!" said the colonel, and jealousy no less than gratitude could be read in his eyes.

The two men understood one other. They grasped each other by the hand again, and stood motionless, gazing in admiration at the serenity that slumber had brought into the lovely face before them. Stéphanie heaved a sigh from time to time, and this sigh, that had all the appearance of sensibility, made the unhappy colonel tremble with gladness.

"Alas!" M. Fanjat said gently, "do not deceive yourself, monsieur; as you see her now, she is in full possession of such reason as she has."

Those who have sat for whole hours absorbed in the delight of watching over the slumber of some tenderly-beloved one, whose waking eyes will smile for them, will doubtless understand the bliss and anguish that shook the colonel. For him this slumber was an illusion, the waking must be a kind of death, the most dreadful of all deaths.

Suddenly a kid frisked in two or three bounds towards the bench, and snuffed at Stéphanie. The sound awakened her; she sprang lightly to her feet without scaring away the capricious creature; but as soon as she saw Philip she fled, followed by her four-footed playmate, to a thicket of elder-trees; then she uttered a little cry like the note of a startled wild-bird, the same sound that the colonel had heard once before near the grating, when the Countess appeared to M. d'Albon for the first time. At length she climbed into a laburnum-tree, ensconced herself in the feathery greenery, and peered out at the *strange man* with as much interest as the most inquisitive nightingale in the forest.

"Farewell, farewell, farewell," she said, but the soul sent no trace of expression of feeling through the words, spoken with the careless intonation of a bird's notes.

"She does not know me!" the colonel exclaimed in despair. "Stéphanie! Here is Philip, your Philip! . . .

Philip!" and the poor soldier went towards the laburnum-tree; but when he stood three paces away, the Countess eyed him almost defiantly, though there was timidity in her eyes; then at a bound she sprang from the laburnum to an acacia, and thence to a spruce-fir, swinging from bough to bough with marvellous dexterity.

"Do not follow her," said M. Fanjat, addressing the colonel. "You would arouse a feeling of aversion in her which might become insurmountable; I will help you to make her acquaintance and to tame her. Sit down on the bench. If you pay no heed whatever to her, poor child, it will not be long before you will see her come nearer by degrees to look at you."

"That *she* should not know me! that *she* should fly from me!" the colonel repeated, sitting down on a rustic bench and leaning his back against a tree that overshadowed it.

He bowed his head. The doctor remained silent. Before very long the Countess stole softly down from her high refuge in the spruce fir, flitting like a will-of-the-wisp; for as the wind stirred the boughs, she lent herself at times to the swaying movements of the trees. At each branch she stopped and peered at the stranger; but as she saw him sitting motionless, she at length jumped down to the grass, stood a while, and came slowly across the meadow. When she took up her position by a tree about ten paces from the bench, M. Fanjat spoke to the colonel in a low voice.

"Feel in my pocket for some lumps of sugar," he said, "and let her see them, she will come; I willingly give up to you the pleasure of giving her sweetmeats. She is passionately fond of sugar, and by that means you will accustom her to come to you and to know you."

"She never cared for sweet things when she was a woman," Philip answered sadly.

When he held out the lump of sugar between his thumb and finger, and shook it, Stéphanie uttered the wild note again, and sprang quickly towards him; then she stopped short, there was a conflict between longing for the sweet morsel and instinctive fear of him; she looked at the sugar, turned her head away, and looked again like an unfortunate dog forbidden to touch some scrap of food, while his master slowly recites the greater part of the alphabet until he reaches the letter that gives permission. At length animal appetite



conquered fear; Stéphanie rushed to Philip, held out a dainty brown hand to pounce upon the coveted morsel, touched her lover's fingers, snatched the piece of sugar, and vanished with it into a thicket. This painful scene was too much for the colonel; he burst into tears, and took refuge in the drawing-room.

"Then has love less courage than affection?" M. Fanjat asked him. "I have hope, Monsieur le Baron. My poor niece was once in a far more pitiable state than at present."

"Is it possible?" cried Philip.

"She would not wear clothes," answered the doctor.

The colonel shuddered, and his face grew pale. To the doctor's mind this pallor was an unhealthy symptom; he went over to him and felt his pulse, M. de Sucy was in a high fever; by dint of persuasion, he succeeded in putting the patient in bed, and gave him a few drops of laudanum to gain repose and sleep.

The Baron de Sucy spent nearly a week, in a constant struggle with a deadly anguish, and before long he had no tears left to shed. He was often well nigh heart-broken; he could not grow accustomed to the sight of the Countess's madness; but he made terms for himself, as it were, in this cruel position, and sought alleviations in his pain. His heroism was boundless. He found courage to overcome Stéphanie's wild shyness by choosing sweetmeats for her, and devoted all his thoughts to this, bringing these dainties, and following up the little victories that he set himself to gain over Stéphanie's instinct (the last gleam of intelligence in her), until he succeeded to some extent—she grew *tamer* than ever before. Every morning the colonel went into the park; and if, after a long search for the Countess, he could not discover the tree in which she was rocking herself gently, nor the nook where she lay crouching at play with some bird, nor the roof where she had perched herself, he would whistle the well-known air *Partant pour la Syrie!* which recalled old memories of their love, and Stéphanie would run towards him lightly as a fawn. She saw the colonel so often that she was no longer afraid of him; before very long she would sit on his knee with her thin, lithe arms about him. And while thus they sat as lovers love to do, Philip doled out sweetmeats one by one to the eager Countess. When they were all finished, the fancy often took Stéphanie to

search through her lover's pockets with a monkey's quick instinctive dexterity, till she had assured herself that there was nothing left, and then she gazed at Philip with vacant eyes; there was no thought, no gratitude in their clear depths. Then she would play with him. She tried to take off his boots to see his foot; she tore his gloves to shreds, and put on his hat; and she would let him pass his hands through her hair, and take her in his arms, and submit passively to his passionate kisses, and at last, if he shed tears, she would gaze silently at him.

She quite understood the signal when he whistled *Partant pour la Syrie*, but he could never succeed in inducing her to pronounce her own name—*Stéphanie*. Philip persevered in his heartrending task, sustained by a hope that never left him. If on some bright autumn morning he saw her sitting quietly on a bench under a poplar tree, grown brown now as the season wore, the unhappy lover would lie at her feet and gaze into her eyes as long as she would let him gaze, hoping that some spark of intelligence might gleam from them. At times he lent himself to an illusion; he would imagine that he saw the hard, changeless light in them falter, that there was a new life and softness in them, and he would cry, "Stéphanie! oh, Stéphanie! you hear me, you see me, do you not?"

But for her the sound of his voice was like any other sound, the stirring of the wind in the trees, or the lowing of the cow on which she scrambled; and the colonel wrung his hands in a despair that lost none of its bitterness; nay, time and these vain efforts only added to his anguish.

One evening, under the quiet sky, in the midst of the silence and peace of the forest hermitage, M. Fanjat saw from a distance that the Baron was busy loading a pistol, and knew that the lover had given up all hope. The blood surged to the old doctor's heart; and if he overcame the dizzy sensation that seized on him, it was because he would rather see his niece live with a disordered brain than lose her for ever. He hurried to the place.

"What are you doing?" he cried.

"That is for me," the colonel answered, pointing to a loaded pistol on the bench, "and this is for her!" he added, as he rammed down the wad into the pistol that he held in his hands.

The Countess lay stretched out on the ground, playing with the balls.

"Then you do not know that last night, as she slept, she murmured 'Philip'?" said the doctor quietly, dissembling his alarm.

"She called my name?" cried the Baron, letting his weapon fall. Stéphanie picked it up, but he snatched it out of her hands, caught the other pistol from the bench, and fled.

"Poor little one!" exclaimed the doctor, rejoicing that his stratagem had succeeded so well. He held her tightly to his heart as he went on. "He would have killed you, selfish that he is! He wants you to die because he is unhappy. He cannot learn to love you for your own sake, little one! We forgive him, do we not? He is senseless; you are only mad. Never mind; God alone shall take you to Himself. We look upon you as unhappy because you no longer share our miseries, fools that we are! . . . Why, she is happy," he said, taking her on his knee; "nothing troubles her; she lives like the birds, like the deer——"

Stéphanie sprang upon a young blackbird that was hopping about, caught it with a little shriek of glee, twisted its neck, looked at the dead bird, and dropped it at the foot of a tree without giving it another thought.

The next morning at daybreak the colonel went out into the garden to look for Stéphanie; hope was very strong in him. He did not see her, and whistled; and when she came he took her arm, and for the first time they walked together along an alley beneath the trees, while the fresh morning wind shook down the dead leaves about them. The colonel sat down, and Stéphanie, of her own accord, lit upon his knee. Philip trembled with gladness.

"Love!" he cried, covering her hands with passionate kisses, "I am Philip . . ."

She looked curiously at him.

"Come close," he added, as he held her tightly. "Do you feel the beating of my heart? It has beat for you, for you only. I love you always. Philip is not dead. He is here. You are sitting on his knee. You are my Stéphanie, I am your Philip!"

"Farewell!" she said, "farewell!"

The colonel shivered. He thought that some vibration

of his highly wrought feeling had surely reached his beloved ; that the heartrending cry, drawn from him by hope, the utmost effort of a love that must last for ever, of passion in its ecstasy, striving to reach the soul of the woman he loved, must awaken her.

" Oh, Stéphanie ! we shall be happy yet ! "

A cry of satisfaction broke from her, a dim light of intelligence gleamed in her eyes.

" She knows me ! . . . Stéphanie ! . . . "

The colonel felt his heart swell, and tears gathered under his eyelids. But all at once the Countess held up a bit of sugar for him to see ; she had discovered it by searching diligently for it while he spoke. What he had mistaken for a human thought was a degree of reason required for a monkey's mischievous trick !

Philip fainted. M. Fanjat found the Countess sitting on his prostrate body. She was nibbling her bit of sugar, giving expression to her enjoyment by little grimaces and gestures that would have been thought clever in a woman in full possession of her senses if she tried to mimic her parouquet or her cat.

" Oh, my friend ! " cried Philip, when he came to himself. " This is like death every moment of the day ! I love her too much ! I could bear anything if only through her madness she had kept some little trace of womanhood. But, day after day, to see her like a wild animal, not even a sense of modesty left, to see her—— "

" So you must have a theatrical madness, must you ? " said the doctor sharply, " and your prejudices are stronger than your lover's devotion ? What, Monsieur ! I resign to you the sad pleasure of giving my niece her food, and the enjoyment of her playtime ; I have kept for myself nothing but the most burdensome cares. I watch over her while you are asleep, I—— Go, Monsieur, and give up the task. Leave this dreary hermitage ; I can live with my little darling ; I understand her disease ; I study her movements ; I know her secrets. Some day you shall thank me. "

The colonel left the Minorite convent, that he was destined to see only once again. The doctor was alarmed by the effect that his words made upon his guest ; his niece's lover became as dear to him as his niece. If either of them deserved to be pitied, that one was certainly Philip ; did

he not bear alone the burden of an appalling sorrow?

The doctor made inquiries, and learned that the hapless colonel had retired to a country house of his near Saint-Germain. A dream had suggested to him a plan for restoring the Countess to reason, and the doctor did not know that he was spending the rest of the autumn in carrying out a vast scheme. A small stream ran through his park, and in winter time flooded a low-lying land, something like the plain on the eastern side of the Beresina. The village of Satout, on the slope of a ridge above it, bounded the horizon of a picture of desolation, something as Studzianka lay on the heights that shut in the swamp of the Beresina. The colonel set labourers to work to make a channel to resemble the greedy river that had swallowed up the treasures of France and Napoleon's army. By the help of his memories, Philip reconstructed on his own lands the bank where General Eblé had built his bridges. He drove in piles, and then set fire to them, so as to reproduce the charred and blackened balks of timber that on either side of the river told the stragglers that their retreat to France had been cut off. He had materials collected like the fragments out of which his comrades in misfortune had made the raft; his park was laid waste to complete the illusion on which his last hopes were founded. He ordered ragged uniforms and clothing for several hundred peasants. Huts and bivouacs and batteries were raised and burned down. In short, he omitted no device that could reproduce that most hideous of all scenes. He succeeded. When, in the earliest days of December, snow covered the earth with a thick white mantle, it seemed to him that he saw the Beresina itself. The mimic Russia was so startlingly real, that several of his old comrades recognised the scene of their past sufferings. M. de Sacy kept the secret of the drama to be enacted with this tragical background, but it was looked upon as a mad freak in several circles of society in Paris.

In the early days of the month of January, 1820, the colonel drove over to the Forest of l'Isle-Adam in a carriage like the one in which M. and Mme. de Vandières had driven from Moscow to Studzianka. The horses closely resembled that other pair that he had risked his life to bring from the Russian lines. He himself wore the grotesque and soiled clothes, accoutrements, and cap that he had worn on the

29th of November, 1812. He had even allowed his hair and beard to grow, and neglected his appearance, that no detail might be lacking to recall the scene in all its horror.

"I guessed what you meant to do," cried M. Fanjat, when he saw the colonel dismount. "If you mean your plan to succeed, do not let her see you in that carriage. This evening I will give my niece a little laudanum, and while she sleeps, we will dress her in such clothes as she wore at Studzianka, and put her in your travelling-carriage. I will follow you in a berline."

Soon after two o'clock in the morning, the young Countess was lifted into the carriage, laid on the cushions, and wrapped in a coarse blanket. A few peasants held torches, while this strange elopement was arranged.

A sudden cry rang through the silence of night, and Philip and the doctor, turning, saw Geneviève. She had come out half-dressed from the low room where she slept.

"Farewell, farewell; it is all over, farewell!" she called, crying bitterly.

"Why, Geneviève, what is it?" asked M. Fanjat.

Geneviève shook her head despairingly, raised her arm to heaven, looked at the carriage, uttered a long snarling sound, and with evident signs of profound terror, slunk in again.

"'Tis a good omen," cried the colonel. "The girl is sorry to lose her companion. Very likely she *sees* that Stéphanie is about to recover her reason."

"God grant it may be so!" answered M. Fanjat, who seemed to be affected by this incident. Since insanity had interested him, he had known several cases in which a spirit of prophecy and the gift of second sight had been accorded to a disordered brain—two faculties which many travellers tell us are also found among savage tribes.

So it happened that, as the colonel had foreseen and arranged, Stéphanie travelled across the mimic Beresina about nine o'clock in the morning, and was awakened by an explosion of rockets about a hundred paces from the scene of action. It was a signal. Hundreds of peasants raised a terrible clamour, like the despairing shouts that startled the Russians when twenty thousand stragglers learned that by their own fault they were delivered over to death or to slavery.

When the Countess heard the report and the cries that followed, she sprang out of the carriage, and rushed in frenzied anguish over the snow-covered plain; she saw the burned bivouacs and the fatal raft about to be launched on a frozen Beresina. She saw Major Philip brandishing his sabre among the crowd. The cry that broke from Mme. de Vandières made the blood run cold in the veins of all who heard it. She stood face to face with the colonel, who watched her with a beating heart. At first she stared blankly at the strange scene about her, then she reflected. For an instant, brief as a lightning flash, there was the same quick gaze and total lack of comprehension that we see in the bright eyes of a bird; then she passed her hand across her forehead with the intelligent expression of a thinking being; she looked round on the memories that had taken substantial form, into the past life that had been transported into her present; she turned her face to Philip—and saw him! An awed silence fell upon the crowd. The colonel breathed hard, but dared not speak; tears filled the doctor's eyes. A faint colour overspread Stéphanie's beautiful face, deepening slowly, till at last she glowed like a girl radiant with youth. Still the bright flush grew. Life and joy, kindled within her at the blaze of intelligence, swept through her like leaping flames. A convulsive tremor ran from her feet to her heart. But all these tokens, which flashed on the sight in a moment, gathered and gained consistence, as it were, when Stéphanie's eyes gleamed with heavenly radiance, the light of a soul within. She lived, she thought! She shuddered—was it with fear? God Himself unloosed a second time the tongue that had been bound by death, and set His fire anew in the extinguished soul. The electric torrent of the human will vivified the body whence it had so long been absent.

"Stéphanie!" the colonel cried.

"Oh! it is Philip!" said the poor Countess.

She fled to the trembling arms held out towards her, and the embrace of the two lovers frightened those who beheld it. Stéphanie burst into tears.

Suddenly the tears ceased to flow; she lay in his arms a dead weight, as if stricken by a thunderbolt, and said faintly—

"Farewell, Philip! . . . I love you . . . farewell!"

"She is dead!" cried the colonel, unclasping his arms.

The old doctor received the lifeless body of his niece in his arms as a young man might have done; he carried her to a stack of wood and set her down. He looked at her face, and laid a feeble hand, tremulous with agitation, upon her heart—it beat no longer.

"Can it really be so?" he said, looking from the colonel, who stood there motionless, to Stéphanie's face. Death had invested it with a radiant beauty, a transient aureole, the pledge, it may be, of a glorious life to come.

"Yes, she is dead."

"Oh, but that smile!" cried Philip; "only see that smile. Is it possible?"

"She has grown cold already," answered M. Fanjat.

M. de Sucy made a few strides to tear himself from the sight; then he stopped, and whistled the air that the mad Stéphanie had understood; and when he saw that she did not rise and hasten to him, he walked away, staggering like a drunken man, still whistling, but he did not turn again.

In society General de Sucy is looked upon as very agreeable, and above all things, as very lively and amusing. Not very long ago a lady complimented him upon his good humour and equable temper.

"Ah! madame," he answered, "I pay very dearly for my merriment in the evening if I am alone."

"Then, you are never alone, I suppose."

"No," he answered, smiling.

If a keen observer of human nature could have seen the look that Sucy's face wore at that moment, he would, without doubt, have shuddered.

"Why do you not marry?" the lady asked (she had several daughters of her own at a boarding-school). "You are wealthy; you belong to an old and noble house; you are clever; you have a future before you; everything smiles upon you."

"Yes," he answered; "one smile is killing me——"

On the morrow the lady heard with amazement that M. de Sucy had shot himself through the head that night.

The fashionable world discussed the extraordinary news in divers ways, and each had a theory to account for it; play, love, ambition, irregularities in private life, according



to the taste of the speaker, explained the last act of the tragedy begun in 1812. Two men alone, a magistrate and an old doctor, knew that Monsieur le Comte de Sucey was one of those souls unhappy in the strength God gives to them to enable them to triumph daily in a ghastly struggle with a mysterious horror. If for a moment God withdraws His sustaining hand, they succumb.

## PAUL HEYSE

### *The Fury*

Paul Heyse was one of the distinguished authors invited by King Maximilian of Bavaria to take up his abode at the court of Munich in 1854. He was particularly notable as a writer of short stories marked by keen observation, humour and grace of style.



## THE FURY

THE day had scarcely dawned. Over Vesuvius hung one broad gray stripe of mist, stretching across as far as Naples, and darkening all the small towns along the coast. The sea lay calm. Along the shore of the narrow creek that lies beneath the Sorrento cliffs, fishermen and their wives were at work already, some with giant cables drawing their boats to land, with the nets that had been cast the night before, while others were rigging their craft, trimming the sails, or fetching out oars and masts from the great grated vaults that have been built deep into the rocks for shelter to the tackle overnight. Nowhere an idle hand; even the very aged, who had long given up going to sea, fell into the long chain of those who were hauling in the nets. Here and there, on some flat housetop, an old woman stood and spun, or busied herself about her grand-children, whom their mother had left to help her husband.

"Do you see, Rachela? yonder is our padre curato," said one to a little thing of ten, who brandished a small spindle by her side; "Antonio is to row him over to Capri. Madre Santissima! but the reverend signore's eyes are dull with sleep!" and she waved her hand to a benevolent-looking little priest, who was settling himself in the boat, and spreading out upon the bench his carefully tucked-up skirts.

The men upon the quay had dropped their work to see their pastor off, who bowed and nodded kindly, right and left.

"What for must he go to Capri, granny?" asked the child. "Have the people there no priest of their own, that they must borrow ours?"

"Silly thing!" returned the granny. "Priests they have in plenty—and the most beautiful of churches, and a hermit too, which is more than we have. But their lives a great signora, who once lived here; she was so very ill! Many's the time our padre had to go and take the Most Holy to

her, when they thought she could not live the night. But with the Blessed Virgin's help she got strong and well, and was able to bathe every day in the sea. When she went away, she left a fine heap of ducats behind her for our church, and for the poor; and she would not go, they say, until our padre promised to go and see her over there, that she might confess to him as before. It is quite wonderful, the store she lays by him! Indeed, and we have cause to bless ourselves for having a curato who has gifts enough for an archbishop, and is in such request with all the great folks. The Madonna be with him!" she cried, and waved her hand again, as the boat was about to put from shore.

"Are we to have fair weather, my son?" inquired the little priest, with an anxious look toward Naples.

"The sun is not yet up," the young man answered; "when he comes, he will easily do for that small trifle of mist."

"Off with you, then! that we may arrive before the heat."

Antonio was just reaching for his long oar to shove away the boat, when suddenly he paused, and fixed his eyes upon the summit of the steep path that leads down from Sorrento to the water. A tall and slender girlish figure had become visible upon the heights, and was now hastily stepping down the stones, waving her handkerchief. She had a small bundle under her arm, and her dress was mean and poor. Yet she had a distinguished if somewhat savage way of throwing back her head, and the dark tress wreathed around it was like a diadem.

"What have we to wait for?" inquired the curato.

"There is someone coming who wants to go to Capri—with your permission, padre. We shall not go a whit the slower. It is a slight young thing, but just eighteen."

At that moment the young girl appeared from behind the wall that bounds the winding path.

"Laurella!" cried the priest. "And what has she to do in Capri?"

Antonio shrugged his shoulders. She came up with hasty steps, her eyes fixed straight before her.

"Ha! l'Arrabiata! good-morning!" shouted one or two of the young boatmen. But for the curato's presence, they might have added more; the look of mute defiance with which the young girl received their welcome appeared to tempt the more mischievous among them.

"Good-day, Laurella!" now said the priest. "How are you? Are you coming with us to Capri?"

"If I may, padre."

"Ask Antonio there; the boat is his. Every man is master of his own, I say, as God is master of us all."

"There is half a carlino, if I may go for that?" said Laurella, without looking at the young boatman.

"You need it more than I," he muttered, and pushed aside some orange-baskets to make room: he was to sell the oranges in Capri, which little isle of rocks has never been able to grow enough for all its visitors.

"I do not choose to go for nothing," said the girl, with a slight frown of her dark eyebrows.

"Come, child," said the priest; "he is a good lad, and had rather not enrich himself with that little morsel of your poverty. Come now, and step in," and he stretched out his hand to help her, "and sit you down by me. See, now, he has spread his jacket for you, that you may sit the softer. Young folks are all alike; for one little maiden of eighteen they will do more than for ten of us reverend fathers. Nay, no excuse, Tonino. It is the Lord's own doing, that like and like should hold together."

Meantime Laurella had stepped in, and seated herself beside the padre, first putting away Antonio's jacket without a word. The young fellow let it lie, and, muttering between his teeth, he gave one vigorous push against the pier, and the little boat flew out into the open bay.

"What are you carrying there in that little bundle?" inquired the padre, as they were floating on over a calm sea, now just beginning to be lighted up with the earliest rays of the rising sun.

"Silk, thread, and a loaf, padre. The silk is to be sold at Anacapri, to a woman who makes ribbons, and the thread to another."

"Spun by yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"You once learned to weave ribbons yourself, if I remember right?"

"I did, sir; but mother has been much worse, and I cannot stay so long from home; and a loom to ourselves we are not rich enough to buy."

"Worse, is she? Ah! dear, dear! when I was with you last, at Easter, she was up."

"The spring is always her worst time. Ever since those last great storms, and the earthquakes, she has been forced to keep her bed from pain."

"Pray, my child. Never slacken your prayers and petitions that the Blessed Virgin may intercede for you; and be industrious and good, that your prayers may find a hearing."

After a pause: "When you were coming toward the shore, I heard them calling after you. 'Good-morning, l'Arrabiata!' they said. What made them call you so? It is not a nice name for a young Christian maiden, who should be meek and mild."

The young girl's brown face glowed all over, while her eyes flashed fire.

"They always mock me so, because I do not dance and sing, and stand about to chatter, as other girls do. I might be left in peace, I think; I do *them* no harm."

"Nay, but you might be civil. Let others dance and sing, on whom this life sits lighter; but a kind word now and then is seemly even from the most afflicted."

Her dark eyes fell, and she drew her eyebrows closer over them, as if she would have hidden them.

They went on a while in silence. The sun now stood resplendent above the mountain chain; only the tip of Mount Vesuvius towered beyond the group of clouds that had gathered about its base; and on the Sorrento plains the houses were gleaming white from the dark green of their orange-gardens.

"Have you heard no more of that painter, Laurella?" asked the curato—"that Neapolitan, who wished so much to marry you?" She shook her head. "He came to make a picture of you. Why would you not let him?"

"What did he want it for? There are handsomer girls than I. Who knows what he would have done with it? He might have bewitched me with it, or hurt my soul, or even killed me, mother says."

"Never believe such sinful things!" said the little curato very earnestly. "Are not you ever in God's keeping, without whose will not one hair of your head can fall? and is one poor mortal with an image in his hand to prevail against the Lord? Besides, you might have seen that he was

fond of you ; else why should he want to marry you ? ”

She said nothing.

“ And wherefore did you refuse him ? He was an honest man, they say, and comely ; and he would have kept you and your mother far better than you ever can yourself, for all your spinning and silk-winding. ”

“ We are so poor ! ” she said passionately ; “ and mother has been ill so long, we should have become a burden to him. And then I never should have done for a signora. When his friends came to see him, he would only have been ashamed of me. ”

“ How can you say so ? I tell you the man was good and kind ; he would even have been willing to settle in Sorrento. It will not be so easy to find another, sent straight from heaven to be the saving of you, as this man, indeed, appeared to be. ”

“ I want no husband—I never shall, ” she said, very stubbornly, half to herself.

“ Is this a vow ? or do you mean to be a nun ? ”

She shook her head.

“ The people are not so wrong who call you wilful, although the name they give you is not kind. Have you ever considered that you stand alone in the world, and that your perverseness must make your sick mother’s illness worse to bear, her life more bitter ? And what sound reason can you have to give for rejecting an honest hand, stretched out to help you and your mother ? Answer me, Laurella. ”

“ I have a reason, ” she said reluctantly, and speaking low ; “ but it is one I cannot give. ”

“ Not give ! not give to me ? not to your confessor, whom you surely know to be your friend—or is he not ? ”

Laurella nodded.

“ Then, child, unburden your heart. If your reason be a good one, I shall be the very first to uphold you in it. Only you are young, and know so little of the world. A time may come when you will find cause to regret a chance of happiness thrown away for some foolish fancy now. ”

Shyly she threw a furtive glance over to the other end of the boat, where the young boatman sat, rowing fast. His woollen cap was pulled deep down over his eyes ; he was gazing far across the water, with averted head, sunk, as it appeared, in his own meditations.



The priest observed her look, and bent his ear down closer.

"You did not know my father?" she whispered, while a dark look gathered in her eyes.

"Your father, child! Why, your father died when you were ten years old. What can your father (Heaven rest his soul in paradise!) have to do with this present perversity of yours?"

"You did not know him, padre; you did not know that mother's illness was caused by him alone."

"And how?"

"By his ill-treatment of her; he beat her and trampled upon her. I well remember the nights when he came home in his fits of frenzy. She never said a word, and did everything he bade her. Yet he would beat her so, my heart felt ready to break. I used to cover up my head and pretend to be asleep, but I cried all night. And then, when he saw her lying on the floor, quite suddenly he would change, and lift her up and kiss her till she screamed and said he smothered her. Mother forbade me ever to say a word of this; but it wore her out. And in all these long years since father died, she has never been able to get well again. And if she should soon die—which God forbid!—I know who it was that killed her."

The little curato's head wagged slowly to and fro; he seemed uncertain how far to acquiesce in the young girl's reasons. At length he said: "Forgive him, as your mother has forgiven! And turn your thoughts from such distressing pictures, Laurella; there may be better days in store for you, which will make you forget the past."

"Never shall I forget that!" she said, and shuddered. "And you must know, padre, it is the reason why I have resolved to remain unmarried. I never will be subject to a man; who may beat and then caress me. Were a man now to want to beat or kiss me, I could defend myself; but mother could not—neither from his blows nor his kisses because she loved him. Now, I will never so love a man as to be made ill and wretched by him."

"You are but a child, and you talk like one who knows nothing at all of life. Are all men like that poor father of yours? Do all ill-treat their wives, and give vent to every whim and gust of passion? Have you never seen a good man yet? or known good wives, who live in peace and harmony with their husbands?"

"But nobody ever knew how father was to mother; she would have died sooner than complain or tell of him, and all because she loved him. If this be love—if love can close our lips when they should cry out for help—if it is to make us suffer without resistance, worse than even our worst enemy could make us suffer—then, I say, I never will be fond of mortal man."

"I tell you you are childish; you know not what you are saying. When your time comes, you are not likely to be consulted whether you choose to fall in love or not." After a pause, he added, "And that painter: did you think he could have been cruel?"

"He made those eyes I have seen my father make, when he begged my mother's pardon and took her in his arms to make it up. I know those eyes. A man may make such eyes, and yet find it in his heart to beat a wife who never did a thing to vex him! It made my flesh creep to see those eyes again."

After this she would not say another word. The curato also remained silent. He bethought himself of more than one wise saying, wherewith the maiden might have been admonished; but he refrained, in consideration of the young boatman, who had been growing rather restless toward the close of this confession.

When, after two hours' rowing, they reached the little bay of Capri, Antonio took the padre in his arms, and carried him through the last few ripples of shallow water, to set him reverently down upon his legs on dry land. But Laura did not wait for him to wade back and fetch her. Gathering up her little petticoat, holding in one hand her wooden shoes and in the other her little bundle, with one splashing step or two she had reached the shore. "I have some time to stay at Capri," said the priest. "You need not wait—I may not perhaps return before to-morrow. When you get home, Laurella, remember me to your mother; I will come and see her within the week. You mean to go back before it gets dark?"

"If I find an opportunity," answered the girl, turning all her attention to her skirts.

"I must return, you know," said Antonio, in a tone which he believed to be one of great indifference. "I shall wait her till the Ave Maria. If you should not come, it is the

"You must come," interposed the little priest; "you never can leave your mother all alone at night. Is it far you have to go?"

"To a vineyard by Anacapri."

"And I to Capri. So now God bless you, child—and you, my son."

Laurella kissed his hand, and let one farewell drop, for the padre and Antonio to divide between them. Antonio, however, appropriated no part of it to himself; he pulled off his cap exclusively to the padre, without even looking at Laurella. But after they had turned their backs, he let his eyes travel but a short way with the padre, as he went toiling over the deep bed of small, loose stones; he soon sent them after the maiden, who, turning to the right, had begun to climb the heights, holding one hand above her eyes to protect them from the scorching sun. Just before the path disappeared behind high walls, she stopped, as if to gather breath, and looked behind her. At her feet lay the marina; the rugged rocks rose high around her; the sea was shining in the rarest of its deep-blue splendour. The scene was surely worth a moment's pause. But, as chance would have it, her eyes, in glancing past Antonio's boat, met Antonio's own, which had been following her as she climbed.

Each made a slight movement, as persons do who would excuse themselves for some mistake; and then, with her darkest look, the maiden went her way.

Hardly one hour had passed since noon, and yet for the last two Antonio had been sitting waiting on the bench before the fisher's tavern. He must have been very much preoccupied with something, for he jumped up every moment to step out into the sunshine, and look carefully up and down the roads, which, parting right and left, led to the only two little towns upon the island. He did not altogether trust the weather, he then said to the hostess of the osteria; to be sure, it was clear enough, but he did not quite like that tint of sea and sky. Just so it had looked, he said, before the last awful storm, when the English family had been so nearly lost; surely she must remember it?

No, indeed, she said, she didn't.

Well, if the weather should happen to change before night, she was to think of him, he said.

"Have you many fine folk over there?" she asked him, after a while.

"They are only just beginning; as yet, the season has been bad enough; those who came to bathe, came late."

"The spring came late. Have you not been earning more than we at Capri?"

"Not enough to give me macaroni twice a week, if I had had nothing but the boat—only a letter now and then to take to Naples, or a gentleman to row out into the open sea, that he might fish. But you know I have an uncle who is rich; he owns more than one fine orange-garden; and, 'Tonino,' says he to me, 'while I live you shall not suffer want; and when I am gone you will find that I have taken care of you.' And so, with God's help, I got through the winter."

"Has he children, this uncle who is rich?"

"No, he never married; he was long in foreign parts, and many a good piastre he has laid together. He is going to set up a great fishing business, and set me over it, to see the rights of it."

"Why, then you are a made man, Tonino!"

The young boatman shrugged his shoulders. "Every man has his own burden," said he, starting up again to have another look at the weather, turning his eyes right and left, although he must have known that there can be no weather side but one.

"Let me fetch you another bottle," said the hostess; "your uncle can well afford to pay for it."

"Not more than one glass; it is a fiery wine you have in Capri, and my head is hot already."

"It does not heat the blood; you may drink as much of it as you like. And here is my husband coming; so you must sit a while, and talk to him."

And in fact, with his nets over his shoulder and his red cap upon his curly head, down came the comely padrone of the osteria. He had been taking a dish of fish to that great lady, to set before the little curato. As soon as he caught sight of the young boatman, he began waving him a most cordial welcome; and he came to sit beside him on the bench, chattering and asking questions. Just as his wife was bringing her second bottle of pure unadulterated Capri, they heard the crisp sand crunch, and Laurella was seen approaching from

the left-hand road to Anacapri. She nodded slightly in salutation ; then stopped, and hesitated.

Antonio sprang from his seat. "I must go," he said. "It is a young Sorrento girl, who came over with the signor curato in the morning. She has to get back to her sick mother before night."

"Well, well, time enough yet before night," observed the fisherman ; "time enough to take a glass of wine. Wife, I say, another glass !"

"I thank you ; I had rather not" ; and Laurella kept her distance.

"Fill the glasses, wife ; fill them both, I say ; she only wants a little pressing."

"Don't," interposed the lad. "It is a wilful head of her own she has ; a saint could not persuade her to do what she does not choose." And, taking a hasty leave, he ran down to the boat, loosened the rope, and stood waiting for Laurella. Again she bent her head to the hostess, and slowly approached the water, with lingering steps. She looked around on every side, as if in hopes of seeing some other passenger. But the marina was deserted. The fishermen were asleep, or rowing about the coast with rods or nets ; a few women and children sat before their doors, spinning or sleeping ; such strangers as had come over in the morning were waiting for the cool of the evening to return. She had not time to look about her long ; before she could prevent him, Antonio had seized her in his arms and carried her to the boat, as if she had been an infant. He leaped in after her, and with a stroke or two of his oar they were in deep water.

She had seated herself at the end of the boat, half turning her back to him, so that he could only see her profile. She wore a sterner look than ever ; the low, straight brow was shaded by her hair ; the rounded lips were firmly closed ; only the delicate nostril occasionally gave a wilful quiver. After they had gone on a while in silence, she began to feel the scorching of the sun ; and, unloosening her bundle, she threw the handkerchief over her head, and began to make her dinner of the bread ; for in Capri she had eaten nothing.

Antonio did not stand this long ; he fetched out a couple of the oranges with which the baskets had been filled in the morning. "Here is something to eat to your bread, Laurella," he said. "Don't think I kept them for you ; they had rolled

out of the basket, and I only found them when I brought the baskets back to the boat."

"Eat them yourself; bread is enough for me."

"They are refreshing in this heat, and you have had to walk so far."

"They gave me a drink of water, and that refreshed me."

"As you please," he said, and let them drop into the basket.

Silence again. The sea was smooth as glass. Not a ripple was heard against the prow. Even the white sea-birds that roost among the caves of Capri pursued their prey with soundless flight.

"You might take the oranges to your mother," again commenced Tonino.

"We have oranges at home; and when they are gone, I can go and buy some more."

"Nay, take these to her, and give them to her with my compliments."

"She does not know you."

"You could tell her who I am."

"I do not know you either."

It was not the first time that she had denied him thus. One Sunday of last year, when that painter had first come to Sorrento, Antonio had chanced to be playing *borcchia* with some other young fellows in the little piazza by the chief street.

There, for the first time, had the painter caught sight of Laurella, who, with her pitcher on her head, had passed by without taking any notice of him. The Neapolitan, struck by her appearance, stood still and gazed after her, not heeding that he was standing in the very midst of the game, which, with two steps, he might have cleared. A very ungentle ball came knocking against his shins, as a reminder that this was not the spot to choose for meditation. He looked round, as if in expectation of some excuse. But the young boatman who had thrown the ball stood silent among his friends, in such an attitude of defiance that the stranger had found it more advisable to go his ways and avoid discussion. Still, this little encounter had been spoken of, particularly at the time when the painter had been pressing his suit to Laurella. "I do not even know him," she said indignantly, when the painter asked her whether it was for the sake of that uncourteous lad she now refused him. But she had heard that

piece of gossip, and known Antonio well enough when she had met him since.

And now they sat together in this boat, like two most deadly enemies, while their hearts were beating fit to kill them. Antonio's usually so good-humoured face was heated to scarlet; he struck the oars so sharply that the foam flew over to where Laurella sat, while his lips moved as if muttering angry words. She pretended not to notice, wearing her most unconscious look, bending over the edge of the boat, and letting the cool water pass between her fingers. Then she threw off her handkerchief again, and began to smooth her hair, as though she had been alone. Only her eyebrows twitched, and she held up her wet hands in vain attempts to cool her burning cheeks.

Now they were well out in the open sea. The island was far behind, and the coast before them lay yet distant in the hot haze. Not a sail was within sight, far or near—not even a passing gull to break the stillness. Antonio looked all round, evidently ripening some hasty resolution. The colour faded suddenly from his cheek, and he dropped his oars. Laurella looked round involuntarily—fearless, yet attentive.

"I must make an end of this," the young fellow burst forth. "It has lasted too long already! I only wonder that it has not killed me! You say you do not know me? And all this time you must have seen me pass you like a madman, my whole heart full of what I had to tell you; and then you only made your crosest mouth, and turned your back upon me."

"What had I to say to you?" she curtly replied. "I may have seen that you were inclined to meddle with me, but I do not choose to be on people's wicked tongues for nothing. I do not mean to have you for a husband—neither you nor any other."

"Nor any other? So you will not always say! You say so now, because you would not have that painter. Bah, you were but a child! You will feel lonely enough yet, some day; and then, wild as you are, you will take the next best who comes to hand."

"Who knows? which of us can see the future? It may be that I will change my mind. What is that to you?"

"What is it to me?" he flew out, starting to his feet, while the small boat leaped and danced. "What is it to me, you

say? You knew well enough! I tell you, that man shall perish miserably to whom you shall prove kinder than you have been to me!"

"And to you, what did I ever promise? Am I to blame if you be mad? What right have you to me?"

"Ah! I know," he cried, "my right is written nowhere. It has not been put in Latin by any lawyer, nor stamped with any seal. But this I feel: I have just the right to you that I have to heaven, if I die an honest Christian. Do you think I could look on and see you go to church with another man, and see the girls go by and shrug their shoulders at me?"

"You can do as you please. I am not going to let myself be frightened by all those threats. I also mean to do as I please."

"You shall not say so long!" and his whole frame shook with passion. "I am not the man to let my whole life be spoiled by a stubborn wench like you! You are in my power here, remember, and may be made to do my bidding."

She could not repress a start, but her eyes flashed bravely on him.

"You may kill me if you dare," she said slowly.

"I do nothing by halves," he said, and his voice sounded choked and hoarse. "There is room for us both in the sea. I cannot help thee, child"—he spoke the last words dreamily, almost pitifully—"but we must both go down together—both at once—and now!" he shouted, and snatched her in his arms. But at the same moment he drew back his right hand; the blood gushed out; she had bitten him fiercely.

"Ha! can I be made to do your bidding?" she cried, and thrust him from her, with one sudden movement. "Am I here in your power?" and she leaped into the sea, and sank.

She rose again directly; her scanty skirts clung close; her long hair, loosened by the waves, hung heavy about her neck. She struck out valiantly, and, without uttering a sound, she began to swim steadily from the boat toward the shore.

With senses benumbed by sudden terror, he stood, with outstretched neck, looking after her, his eyes fixed as though they had just been witness to a miracle. Then, giving himself a shake, he seized his oars, and began rowing after her with all the strength he had, while all the time the bottom of the boat was reddening fast with the blood that kept streaming from his hand.



of the bright moonlight, and also by the pain of his hand ; he had just risen for more cold water to soothe its throbbings, when he heard the sound of someone at the door. Laurella stood before him.

She came in without a question, took off the handkerchief she had tied over her head, and placed her little basket upon the table ; then she drew a deep breath.

"You are come to fetch your handkerchief," he said. "You need not have taken that trouble. In the morning I would have asked Giuseppe to take it to you."

"It is not the handkerchief," she said quickly. "I have been up among the hills to gather herbs to stop the blood ; see here." And she lifted the lid of her little basket.

"Too much trouble," he said, not in bitterness—"far too much trouble. I am better, much better ; but if I were worse, it would be no more than I deserve. Why did you come at such a time ? If any one should see you ? You know how they talk, even when they don't know what they are saying."

"I care for no one's talk," she said, passionately. "I came to see your hand, and put the herbs upon it ; you cannot do it with your left."

"It is not worth while, I tell you."

"Let me see it then, if I am to believe you."

She took his hand, that was not able to prevent her, and unbound the linen. When she saw the swelling, she shuddered, and gave a cry : "Jesus Maria !"

"It is a little swollen," he said ; "it will be over in four-and-twenty hours."

She shook her head. "It will certainly be a week before you can go to sea."

"More likely a day or two ; and if not, what matters ?"

She had fetched a basin, and began carefully washing out the wound, which he suffered passively, like a child. She then laid on the healing leaves, which at once relieved the burning pain, and finally bound it up with the linen she had brought with her.

When it was done : "I thank you," he said. "And now, if you would do me one more kindness, forgive the madness that came over me ; forget all I said and did. I cannot tell how it came to pass ; certainly it was not your fault—not yours. And never shall you hear from me again one word to vex you."

She interrupted him. "It is I who have to beg your pardon. I should have spoken differently. I might have explained it better, and not enraged you with my sullen ways. And now that bite——"

"It was in self-defence; it was high time to bring me to my senses. As I said before, it is nothing at all to signify. Do not talk of being forgiven; you only did me good, and I thank you for it. And now, here is your handkerchief; take it with you."

He held it to her, but yet she lingered, hesitated, and appeared to have some inward struggle. At length she said: "You have lost your jacket, and by my fault; and I know that all the money for the oranges was in it. I did not think of this till afterward. I cannot replace it now; we have not so much at home—or if we had, it would be mother's. But this I have—this silver cross. That painter left it on the table the day he came for the last time. I have never looked at it all this while, and do not care to keep it in my box; if you were to sell it? It must be worth a few piastres, mother says. It might make up the money you have lost; and if not quite, I could earn the rest by spinning at night when mother is asleep."

"Nothing will make me take it," he said shortly, pushing away the bright new cross which she had taken from her pocket.

"You must," she said; "how can you tell how long your hand may keep you from your work? There it lies; and nothing can make me so much as look at it again."

"Drop it in the sea, then."

"It is no present I want to make you; it is no more than is your due; it is only fair."

"Nothing from you can be due to me; and hereafter when we chance to meet, if you would do me a kindness, I beg you not to look my way. It would make me feel you were thinking of what I have done. And now good-night; and let this be the last word said."

She laid the handkerchief in the basket, and also the cross, and closed the lid. But when he looked into her face, he started. Great heavy drops were rolling down her cheeks; she let them flow unheeded.

"Maria Santissima!" he cried. "Are you ill? You are trembling from head to foot!"

"It is nothing," she said; "I must go home"; and with unsteady steps she was moving to the door, when suddenly she leaned her brow against the wall, and gave way to a fit of bitter sobbing. Before he could go to her she turned upon him suddenly, and fell upon his neck.

"I cannot bear it!" she cried, clinging to him as a dying thing to life—"I cannot bear it! I cannot let you speak so kindly, and bid me go, with all this on my conscience. Beat me! trample on me! curse me! Or if it can be that you love me still after all I have done to you, take me and keep me, and do with me as you please; only do not send me away so!" She could say no more for sobbing.

Speechless, he held her a while in his arms. "If I can love you still!" he cried at last. "Holy Mother of God! Do you think that all my best heart's blood has gone from me through that little wound? Don't you hear it hammering now, as though it would burst my breast and go to you? But if you say this to try me, or because you pity me, I can forget it. You are not to think you owe me this, because you know what I have suffered for you."

"No!" she said very resolutely, looking up from his shoulder into his face, with her tearful eyes; "it is because I love you; and let me tell you, it was because I always feared to love you that I was so cross. I will be so different now. I never could bear again to pass you in the street without one look! And lest you should ever feel a doubt, I will kiss you, that you may say, 'She kissed me'; and Laurella kisses no man but her husband."

She kissed him thrice, and, escaping his arms: "And now good-night, *amor mio, cara vita mia!*" she said. "Lie down to sleep, and let your hand get well. Do not come with me; I am afraid of no man, save of you alone."

And so she slipped out, and soon disappeared in the shadow of the wall.

He remained standing by the window, gazing far out over the calm sea, while all the stars in heaven appeared to flit before his eyes.

The next time the little curato sat in his confessional, he sat smiling to himself. Laurella had just risen from her knees after a very long confession.

"Who would have thought it?" he said musingly—

“that the Lord would so soon have taken pity upon that wayward little heart? And I had been reproaching myself for not having adjured more sternly that ill demon of perversity. Our eyes are but shortsighted to see the ways of Heaven! Well, may God bless her, I say, and let me live to go to sea with Laurella’s eldest born rowing me in his father’s place! Ah! well, indeed! l’Arrabiata!”



## ANATOLE FRANCE

### *Our Lady's Juggler*

Anatole Fran| most famous French author of his time, a novelist, poet and critic of versatile genius. Among his best-known works were *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*, a *Life of Joan of Arc*, and a brilliant satire on modern France called *Penguin Island*. In 1921 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.



## OUR LADY'S JUGGLER

**I**N the days of King Louis there lived a poor juggler by the name of Barnabas, a native of Compiègne, who wandered from city to city performing tricks of skill and prowess.

On fair days he would lay down in the public square a worn and aged carpet, and after having attracted a group of children and idlers by certain amusing remarks which he had learned from an old juggler, and which he invariably repeated in the same fashion without altering a word, he would assume the strangest postures, and balance a pewter plate on the tip of his nose. At first the crowd regarded him with indifference, but when, with his hands and head on the ground he threw into the air and caught with his feet six copper balls that glittered in the sunlight, or when, throwing himself back until his neck touched his heels, he assumed the form of a perfect wheel and in that position juggled with twelve knives, he elicited a murmur of admiration from his audience, and small coins rained on his carpet.

Still, Barnabas of Compiègne, like most of those who exist by their accomplishments, had a hard time making a living. Earning his bread by the sweat of his brow, he bore rather more than his share of those miseries we are all heir to through the fault of our Father Adam.

Besides, he was unable to work as much as he would have liked, for in order to exhibit his wonderful talents, he required—like the trees—the warmth of the sun and the heat of the day. In winter time he was no more than a tree stripped of its leaves, in fact, half-dead. The frozen earth was too hard for the juggler. Like the cicada mentioned by Marie de France, he suffered during the bad season from hunger and cold. But since he had a simple heart, he suffered in silence.

He had never thought much about the origin of wealth nor about the inequality of human conditions. He firmly believed that if this world was evil the next could not but



be good, and this faith upheld him. He was not like the clever fellows who sell their souls to the devil; he never took the name of God in vain; he lived the life of an honest man, and though he had no wife of his own, he did not covet his neighbour's, for woman is the enemy of strong men, as we learn by the story of Samson which is written in the Scriptures.

Verily, his mind was not turned in the direction of carnal desire, and it cause him far greater pain to renounce drinking than to forego the pleasure of women. For, though he was not a drunkard, he enjoyed drinking when the weather was warm. He was a good man, fearing God, and devout in his adoration of the Holy Virgin. When he went into a church he never failed to kneel before the image of the Mother of God and to address her with this prayer:

"My Lady, watch over my life until it shall please God that I die, and when I am dead, see that I have the joys of Paradise."

One evening, after a day of rain, as he walked sad and bent with his juggling balls under his arm and his knives wrapped up in his old carpet seeking some barn where he might go supperless to bed, he saw a monk going in his direction, and respectfully saluted him. As they were both walking at the same pace, they fell into conversation.

"Friend," said the monk, "how does it happen that you are dressed all in green? Are you perchance going to play the part of the fool in some mystery?"

"No, indeed, father," said Barnabas. "My name is Barnabas, and my business is that of juggler. it would be the finest calling in the world if I could eat every day."

"Friend Barnabas," answered the monk, "be careful what you say. There is no finer calling than the monastic. The priest celebrates the praise of God, the Virgin, and the saints; the life of a monk is a perpetual hymn to the Lord."

And Barnabas replied: "Father, I confess I spoke like an ignorant man. My estate cannot be compared to yours, and though there may be some merit in dancing and balancing a stick with a denier on top of it on the end of your nose, it is in no wise comparable to your merit. Father, I wish I might, like you, sing the Office every day, especially the Office of the Very Holy Virgin, to whom I am specially and piously devoted. I would willingly give up the art by

which I am known from Soissons to Beauvais, in more than six hundred cities and villages, in order to enter the monastic life."

The monk was touched by the simplicity of the juggler, and as he was not lacking in discernment, he recognised in Barnabas one of those well-disposed men of whom Our Lord has said, "Let peace be with them on earth." And he made answer therefore :

"Friend Barnabas, come with me and I will see that you enter the monastery of which I am the Prior. He who led Mary the Egyptian through the desert put me across your path in order that I might lead you to salvation."

Thus did Barnabas become a monk. In the monastery which he entered, the monks celebrated most magnificently the cult of the Holy Virgin, each of them bringing to her service all the knowledge and skill which God had given him.

The Prior, for his part, wrote books, setting forth, according to the rules of scholasticism, all the virtues of the Mother of God. Brother Maurice copied these treatises with a cunning hand on pages of parchment, while Brother Aléxandre decorated them with delicate miniatures representing the Queen of Heaven seated on the throne of Solomon, with four lions on guard at the foot of it. Around her head, which was encircled by a halo, flew seven doves, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: fear, piety, knowledge, power, judgment, intelligence, and wisdom. With her were six golden-haired virgins: Humility, Prudence, Retirement, Respect, Virginity, and Obedience. At her feet two little figures, shining white and quite naked, stood in suppliant attitudes. They were souls imploring, not in vain, her all-powerful intercession for their salvation. On another page Brother Aléxandre depicted Eve in the presence of Mary, that one might see at the same time sin and its redemption, woman humiliated, and the Virgin exalted. Among the other much-prized pictures in his book were the Well of Living Waters, the Fountain, the Lily, the Moon, the Sun, and the Closed Garden, of which much is said in the Canticle; the Gate of Heaven and the City of God: These were all images of the Virgin.

Brother Marbode, too, was one of the cherished children of Mary. He was ever busy cutting images of stone, so that

his beard, his eye-brows and his hair were white with the dust, and his eyes perpetually swollen and full of tears. But he was a hardy and a happy man in his old age, and there was no doubt that the Queen of Paradise watched over the declining days of Her child. Marbode represented Her seated in a pulpit, Her forehead encircled by a halo, with an orb of pearls. He was at great pains to make the folds of Her robe cover the feet of Her of whom the prophet has said, "My beloved is like a closed garden."

At times he represented Her as a graceful child, and Her image seemed to say, "Lord, Thou art My Lord!"

There were also in the Monastery poets who composed prose writings in Latin and hymns in honour of the Most Gracious Virgin Mary; there was, indeed, one among them—a Picard—who translated the Miracles of Our Lady into rimed verses in the vulgar tongue.

Perceiving so great a competition in praise and so fine a harvest of good works, Barnabas fell to lamenting his ignorance and simplicity.

"Alas!" he sighed as he walked by himself one day in the little garden shaded by the Monastery wall, "I am so unhappy because I cannot, like my brothers, give worthy praise to the Holy Mother of God to whom I have consecrated all the love in my heart. Alas, I am a stupid fellow, without art, and for your service, Madame, I have no edifying sermons, no fine treatises nicely prepared according to the rules, no beautiful paintings, no cunningly carved statues, and no verses counted off by feet and marching in measure! Alas, I have nothing!"

Thus did he lament and abandon himself to his misery.

One evening when the monks were talking together by way of diversion, he heard one of them tell of a monk who could not recite anything but the *Ave Maria*. He was scorned for his ignorance, but after he died there sprang from his mouth five roses, in honour of the five letters in the name Maria. Thus was his holiness made manifest.

In listening to this story, Barnabas was conscious once more of the Virgin's beneficence, but he was not consoled by the example of the happy miracle, for his heart was full of zeal and he wanted to celebrate the glory of His Lady in Heaven.

He sought for a way in which to do this, but in vain,

and each day brought him greater sorrow, until one morning he sprang joyously from his cot and ran to the chapel, where he remained alone for more than an hour. He returned thither again after dinner, and from that day onward he would go into the chapel every day the moment it was deserted, passing the greater part of the time with the other monks dedicated to the pursuit of the liberal arts and the sciences. He was no longer sad and he sighed no more. But such singular conduct aroused the curiosity of the other monks, and they asked themselves why Brother Barnabas retired alone so often, and the Prior, whose business it was to know everything that his monks were doing, determined to observe Barnabas. One day, therefore, when Barnabas was alone in the chapel, the Prior entered in company with two of the oldest brothers, in order to watch, through the bars of the door, what was going on within.

They saw Barnabas before the image of the Holy Virgin, his head on the floor and his feet in the air, juggling with six copper balls and twelve knives. In honour of the Holy Virgin he was performing the tricks which had in former days brought him the greatest fame. Not understanding that he was thus putting his best talents at the service of the Holy Virgin, the aged brothers cried out against sacrilege. The Prior knew that Barnabas had a simple soul, but he believed that the man had lost his wits. All three set about to remove Barnabas from the chapel, when they saw the Virgin slowly descend from the altar and, with a fold of her blue mantle, wipe the sweat that streamed over the juggler's forehead.

Then the Prior, bowing his head down to the marble floor, repeated these words :

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

"Amen," echoed the brothers, bowing down to the floor.



## CHARLES KINGSLEY

### *A Perfect Husband—and a Perfect Wife*

Charles Kingsley, Canon of Westminster, novelist and poet, wrote a number of books attacking social abuses of the day. His best and most popular work, however, was *Westward Ho!* a stirring story of Elizabethan adventure, from which the following story is taken.



## A PERFECT HUSBAND—AND A PERFECT WIFE

“**L**ADIES,” said Don Guzman, “if we be more jealous than other nations, it is because we love more passionately. If some of us abroad are profligate, it is because they, poor men, have no helpmate, which, like the amethyst, keeps its wearer pure. I could tell you stories, ladies, of the constancy and devotion of Spanish husbands, even in the Indies, as strange as ever romancer invented.”

“Can you? Then we challenge you to give us one at least.”

“I fear it would be too long, madam.”

“The longer the more pleasant, señor. How can we spend an hour better this afternoon, while the gentlemen within are finishing their wine?”

Story-telling in those old times, when books (and authors also, luckily for the public) were rarer than now, was a common amusement; and as the Spaniard’s accomplishments in that line were well known, all the ladies crowded round him; the servants brought chairs and benches; and Don Guzman, taking his seat in the midst, with a proud humility, at Lady Grenville’s feet, began:—

“Your perfections, fair and illustrious ladies, must doubtless have heard, ere now, how Sebastian Cabota, some forty-five years ago, sailed forth with a commission from my late master, the Emperor Charles the Fifth, to discover the golden lands of Tarshish, Ophir, and Cipango: but being in want of provisions, stopped short at the mouth of that mighty South American river to which he gave the name of Rio de la Plata, and sailing up it, discovered the fair land of Paraguay. But you may not have heard how, on the bank of that river, at the mouth of the Rio Terceiro, he built a fort which men still call Cabot’s Tower; nor have you, perhaps, heard of the strange tale which will ever make the tower a sacred spot to all true lovers.

“For when he returned to Spain the year after, he left



in his tower a garrison of a hundred and twenty men, under the command of Nuño de Lara, Ruiz Moschera, and Sebastian da Hurtado, old friends and fellow-soldiers of my invincible grandfather, Don Ferdinando da Soto; and with them a jewel, than which Spain never possessed one more precious, Lucia Miranda, the wife of Hurtado, who, famed in the Court of the Emperor no less for her wisdom and modesty than for her unrivalled beauty, 'had thrown up all the pomp and ambition of a palace, to marry a poor adventurer, and to encounter with him the hardships of a voyage round the world. Mangora, the Cacique of the neighbouring Timbuez Indians (with whom Lara had contrived to establish a friendship), cast his eyes on this fair creature, and no sooner saw than he coveted, no sooner coveted than he plotted, with the devilish subtlety of a savage, to seize by force what he knew he could never gain by right. She soon found out his passion (she was wise enough—what every woman is not—to know when she is loved), and telling her husband, kept as much as she could out of her new lover's sight; while the savage pressed Hurtado to come and visit him, and to bring his lady with him. Hurtado, suspecting the snare, and yet fearing to offend the Cacique, excused himself courteously on the score of his soldier's duty; and the savage, mad with desire and disappointment, began plotting against Hurtado's life.

"So went on several weeks, till food grew scarce, and Don Hurtado and Don Ruiz Moschera, with fifty soldiers, were sent up the river on a foraging party. Mangora saw his opportunity, and leapt at it forthwith.

"The tower, ladies, as I have heard from those who have seen it, stands on a knoll at the meeting of the two rivers, while on the land side stretches a dreary marsh, covered with tall grass and bushes; a fit place for the ambuscade of four thousand Indians, which Mangora, with devilish cunning, placed around the tower, while he himself went boldly up to it, followed by thirty men, laden with grain, fruit, game and all the delicacies which his forests could afford.

"There, with a smiling face, he told the unsuspecting Lara his sorrow for the Spaniards' want of food; besought him to accept the provision he had brought, and was, as he had expected, invited by Lara to come in and taste the wines of Spain.

"In went he and his thirty fellow-bandits, and the feast continued, with songs and libations, far into the night, while Mangora often looked round, and at last boldly asked for the fair Miranda; but she had shut herself into her lodging, pleading illness.

"A plea, fair ladies, which little availed that hapless dame: for no sooner had the Spaniards retired to rest, leaving (by I know not what madness) Mangora and his Indians within, than they were awakened by the cry of fire, the explosion of their magazine, and the inward rush of the four thousand from the marsh outside.

"Why pain your gentle ears with details of slaughter? A few fearful minutes sufficed to exterminate my bewildered and unarmed countrymen, to bind the only survivors, Miranda (innocent cause of the whole tragedy) and four other women with their infants, and to lead them away in triumph across the forests toward the Indian town.

"Stunned by the suddenness of the evils which had passed, and still more by the thought of those worse which were to come (as she too well foresaw), Miranda travelled all night through the forest, and was brought in triumph at day-dawn before the Indian king to receive her doom. Judge of her astonishment, when, on looking up, she saw that he was not Mangora.

"A ray of hope flashed across her, and she asked where he was.

"'He was slain last night,' said the king; 'and I, his brother, Siripa, am now Cacique of the Timbuez.'

"It was true; Lara, maddened with drink, rage and wounds, had caught up his sword, rushed into the thick of the fight, singled out the traitor, and slain him on the spot; and then, forgetting safety in revenge, had continued to plunge his sword into the corpse, heedless of the blows of the savages, till he fell, pierced with a hundred wounds.

"A ray of hope, as I said, flashed across the wretched Miranda for a moment: but the next she found that she had been freed from one bandit only to be delivered to another.

"'Yes,' said the new king, in broken Spanish, 'my brother played a bold stake, and lost it: but it was well worth the risk, and he showed his wisdom thereby. You

cannot be his queen now : you must content yourself with being mine.'

"Miranda, desperate, answered him with every fierce taunt which she could invent against his treachery and his crime ; and asked him, how he came to dream that the wife of a Christian Spaniard would condescend to become the mistress of a heathen savage ; hoping, unhappy lady, to exasperate him into killing her on the spot. But in vain ; she only prolonged thereby her own misery. For, whether it was, ladies, that the novel sight of divine virtue and beauty awed (as it may have awed me ere now) where it had just before maddened ; or whether some dream crossed the savage (as it may have crossed me ere now) that he could make the wisdom of a mortal angel help his ambition, as well as her beauty his happiness ; or whether (which I will never believe of one of those dark children of the devil, though I can boldly assert it of myself) some spark of nobleness within him made him too proud to take by force what he could not win by persuasion, certain it is, as the Indians themselves confessed afterwards, that the savage only answered her by smiles ; and bidding his men unbind her, told her that she was no slave of his, and that it only lay with her to become the sovereign of him and all his vassals ; assigned her a hut to herself, loaded her with savage ornaments, and for several weeks, treated her with no less courtesy (so miraculous is the power of love) than if he had been a cavalier of Castile.

"Three months and more, ladies, as I have heard, passed in this misery, and every day Miranda grew more desperate of all deliverance, and saw staring her in the face, nearer and nearer, some hideous and shameful end ; when one day, going down with the wives of the Cacique to draw water in the river, she saw on the opposite bank a white man in a tattered Spanish dress, with a drawn sword in his hand ; who had no sooner espied her, than shrieking her name, he plunged into the stream, swam across, landed at her feet, and clasped her in his arms. It was no other, ladies, incredible as it may seem, than Don Sebastian himself, who had returned with Ruiz Moschera to the tower, and found it only a charred and blood-stained heap of ruins.

"Hé guessed, as by inspiration, what had passed, and whither his lady was gone ; and without a thought of danger,

like a true Spanish gentleman, and a true Spanish lover, darted off alone into the forest, and guided only by the inspiration of his own loyal heart, found again his treasure, and found it still unstained and his own.

"Who can describe the joy, and who again the terror of their meeting? The Indian women had fled in fear, and for the short ten minutes that the lovers were left together, life, be sure, was one long kiss. But what to do they knew not. To go inland was to rush into the enemy's arms. He would have swum with her across the river, and attempted it; but his strength, worn out with hunger and travel, failed him; he drew her with difficulty on shore again, and sat down by her to await their doom with prayer, the first and last resource of virtuous ladies, as weapons are of cavaliers.

"Alas for them! May no true lovers ever have to weep over joys so soon lost, after having been so hardly found! For, ere a quarter of an hour was passed, the Indian women who had fled at his approach, returned with all the warriors of the tribe. Don Sebastian, desperate, would fain have slain his wife and himself on the spot: but his hand sank again—and whose would not but an Indian's?—as he raised it against that fair and faithful breast; in a few minutes he was surrounded, seized from behind, disarmed, and carried in triumph into the village. And if you cannot feel for him in that misery, fair ladies, who have known no sorrow, yet I, a prisoner, can."

Don Guzman paused a moment, as if overcome by emotion; and I will not say that, as he paused, he did not look to see if Rose Salterne's eyes were on him, as indeed they were.

"Yes, I can feel with him; I can estimate, better than you, ladies, the greatness of that love which could submit to captivity; to the loss of his sword; to the loss of that honour, which, next to God and his mother, is the true Spaniard's deity. There are those who have suffered that shame at the hands of valiant gentlemen (and again Don Guzman looked up at Rose), and yet would have sooner died a thousand deaths: but he dared to endure it from the hands of villains, savages, heathens; for he was a true Spaniard, and therefore a true lover: but I will go on with my tale.

"This wretched pair, then as I have been told by Ruiz

Moschera himself, stood together before the Cacique. He like a true child of the devil, comprehending in a moment, who Don Sebastian was, laughed with delight at seeing his rival in his power, and bade bind him at once to a tree, and shoot him to death with arrows.

"But the poor Miranda sprang forward, and threw herself at his feet, and with piteous entreaties besought for mercy from him who knew no mercy.

"And yet love, and the sight of her beauty, and the terrible eloquence of her words, while she invoked on his head the just vengeance of Heaven, wrought even on his heart: nevertheless, the pleasure of seeing her, who had so long scorned him, a suppliant at his feet, was too delicate to be speedily foregone; and not till she was all but blind with tears, and dumb with agony of pleading, did he make answer, that if she would consent to become his wife, her husband's life should be spared. She, in her haste and madness, sobbed out desperately I know not what consent. Don Sebastian, who understood, if not the language, still the meaning (so had love quickened his understanding), shrieked to her not to lose her precious soul for the sake of his worthless body; that death was nothing compared to the horror of that shame; and such other words as became a noble and valiant gentleman. She, shuddering now at her own frailty, would have recalled her promise: but Siripa kept her to it, vowing, if she disappointed him again, such a death to her husband as made her blood run cold to hear of; and the wretched woman could only escape for the present by some story, that it was not the custom of her race to celebrate nuptials till a month after the betrothment; that the anger of Heaven would be on her, unless she first performed in solitude certain religious rites; and lastly, that if he dared to lay hands on her husband, she would die so resolutely, that every drop of water should be deep enough to drown her, every thorn sharp enough to stab her to the heart: till fearing lest by demanding too much he should lose all, and awed too, as he had been at first, by a voice and looks which seemed to be, in comparison with his own, divine, Siripa bade her go back to her hut, promising her husband life: but promising, too, that if he ever found the two speaking together, even for a moment, he would pour out on them both all the cruelty of those

tortures in which the devil, their father, has so perfectly instructed the Indians.

“So Don Sebastian, being stripped of his garments, and painted after the Indian fashion, was set to all mean and toilsome work, amid the buffetings and insults of the whole village. And this, ladies, he endured without a murmur, ay, took delight in enduring it, as he would have endured things worse a thousand times, only for the sake, like a true lover as he was, of being near the goddess whom he worshipped, and of seeing her now and then afar off, happy enough to be repaid even by that for all indignities.

“And yet, you who have loved may well guess, as I can, that ere a week had passed, Don Sebastian and the Lady Miranda had found means, in spite of all spiteful eyes, to speak to each other once and again; and to assure each other of their love; even to talk of escape, before the month’s grace should be expired, and Miranda, whose heart was full of courage as long as she felt her husband near her, went so far as to plan a means of escape which seemed possible and hopeful.

“For the youngest wife of the Cacique, who, till Miranda’s coming, had been his favourite, often talked with the captive, insulting and tormenting her in her spite and jealousy, and receiving in return only gentle and conciliatory words. And one day, when the woman had been threatening to kill her, Miranda took courage to say, ‘Do you fancy that I shall not be as glad to be rid of your husband, as you to be rid of me? Why kill me needlessly, when all that you require is to get me forth of the place? Out of sight, out of mind. When I am gone, your husband will soon forget me, and you will be his favourite as before.’” Soon, seeing that the girl was inclined to listen, she went on to tell her of her love to Don Sebastian, entreating and adjuring her, by the love which she bore the Cacique, to pity and help her; and so won upon the girl, that she consented to be privy to Miranda’s escape, and even offered to give her an opportunity of speaking to her husband about it; and at last was so won over by Miranda, that she consented to keep all intruders out of the way, while Don Sebastian that very night visited Miranda in her hut.

“The hapless husband, thirsting for his love, was in that hut, be sure, the moment that kind darkness covered his

steps ; and what cheer these two made of each other, when they once found themselves together, lovers must fancy for themselves : but so it was, that after many a leave-taking, there was no departure ; and when the night was wellnigh past, Sebastian and Miranda were still talking together, as if they had never met before, and would never meet again.

“ But it befell, ladies (would that I was not speaking the truth, but inventing, that I might have invented something merrier for your ears), it befell that very night, that the young wife of the Cacique, whose heart was lifted up with the thought that her rival was now at last disposed of, tried all her wiles to win back her faithless husband ; but in vain. He only answered her caresses by indifference, then by contempt, then insults, then blows (for with the Indians, woman is always a slave, or rather a beast of burden), and went on to draw such cool comparisons between her dark skin and the glorious fairness of the Spanish lady, that the wretched girl, beside herself with rage, burst out at last with her own secret. ‘ Fool that you are to madden yourself about a stranger who prizes one hair of her Spanish husband’s head more than your whole body ! Much does your new bride care for you ! She is at this moment in her husband’s arms ! ’ ”

“ The Cacique screamed furiously to know what she meant ; and she, her jealousy and hate of the guiltless lady boiling over once for all, bade him, if he doubted her, go and see for himself.

“ What use of many words ? They were taken. Love, or rather lust, repelled, turned in a moment into devilish hate ; and the Cacique, summoning his Indians, bade them bind the wretched Don Sebastian to a tree, and there inflicted on him the lingering death to which he had at first been doomed. For Miranda he had more exquisite cruelty in store. And shall I tell it ? Yes, ladies, for the honour of love and of Spain, and for a justification of those cruelties against the Indians which are so falsely imputed to our most Christian nation, it shall be told : he delivered the wretched lady over to the tender mercies of his wives ; and what they were, is neither fit for me to tell, nor you to hear.

“ The two wretched lovers cast themselves upon each other’s neck ; drank each other’s salt tears with the last kisses ; accused themselves as the cause of each other’s death ; and then, rising above fear and grief, broke out

into triumph at thus dying for and with each other ; and proclaiming themselves the martyrs of love, commended their souls to God, and then stepped joyfully and proudly to their doom."

"And what was that?" asked half a dozen trembling voices.

"Don Sebastian, as I have said, was shot to death with arrows ; but as for the lady Miranda, the wretches themselves confessed afterwards, when they received due vengeance for their crimes (as they did receive it), that after all shameful and horrible indignities, she was bound to a tree, and there burned slowly in her husband's sight, stifling her shrieks lest they should wring his heart by one additional pang, and never taking her eyes, to the last, off that beloved face. And so died (but not unavenged) Sebastian de Hurtado and Lucia Miranda—a Spanish husband and a Spanish wife."

The Don paused, and the ladies were silent awhile ; for, indeed, there was many a gentle tear to be dried : but at last Mrs. St. Leger spoke, half, it seemed, to turn off the too painful impression of the over-true tale, the outlines whereof may be still read in old Charlevoix.

"You have told a sad and a noble tale, sir, and told it well : but, though your story was to set forth a perfect husband, it has ended rather by setting forth a perfect wife."

"And if I have forgotten, madam, in praising her to praise him also, have I not done that which would have best pleased his heroical and chivalrous spirit? He, be sure, would have forgotten his own virtue in the light of hers ; and he would have wished me, I doubt not, to do the same also. And beside, madam, where ladies are the theme, who has time or heart to cast one thought upon their slaves?"





J. S. FLETCHER

*The Revolver*

J. S. Fletcher is an author and journalist of remarkable versatility. He has written extensively on rural life under the pseudonym of "A Son of the Soil," he is an authority on the history of Yorkshire, and of late years he has acquired a great reputation as a writer of mystery stories.



## THE REVOLVER

AS I drew the revolver from my pocket the moon, then at its full, burst suddenly from behind a bank of cloud. Its light, sharp and brilliant in the clear atmosphere, smote out a spark of scintillating fire from the polished barrel. I gazed at it thoughtfully as it danced and coruscated like the white light of a diamond.

"I wonder," I said, half aloud, "I wonder."

A quick, light step on the gravelled walk behind me—a light, insistent hand on my arm, an equally light, but decidedly steel-like grip on the wrist of the hand which held the revolver—a girl's voice, frightened, reproachful and yet sympathetic.

"Oh, please, don't—please!"

I looked round, and down. A pair of anxious grey eyes, looking into mine with a pleading expression, a slim figure veiled in white draperies, a scent of violets.

"Please—please! Besides—it's so wicked."

I suppose we made a good stage picture; a man and a maid in sober black and white, outlined against an excellent setting. There was silver moonlight; there was the Mediterranean; there were the lights of Monte Carlo; there were palm trees, flowers, luxuriant plants. And, just as if we had been on a real stage, with real scenery, there was the proper accompaniment of the proper sort of music—soft, dreamy. Somewhere, not far off, a band was playing one of Strauss's most languorous waltzes.

I regarded my assailant in silence. Perhaps my mouth was wide open—I am sure I was sufficiently surprised to make it so. What a grip she kept on that right wrist of mine!

She shook me a little with the other hand.

"Do you hear?" she said. "You—you mustn't."

I found my tongue.

"I beg your pardon," I said, with the greatest show of

politeness which I could assume under the circumstances, being literally handcuffed. "Did—did you think I was going to—to shoot somebody?"

I saw the brows under the big, fleecy wrap draw themselves together with a frown. The grey eyes regarded me with speculative wonder. But there was no relaxation of the firm hold on my wrist.

"To shoot somebody! Were you not going to shoot——?"

Her eyes said the rest.

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "I begin to see why I am taken prisoner. You thought, madam, that I was about to shoot myself."

"Weren't you?" she asked faintly, and with palpable surprise.

"Not at present," I replied. "And, unless it is by accident, not at all, so far as I know."

She looked into my eyes very searchingly. I returned her gaze with an equally examining regard. She released me.

"Thank you," I said. "I congratulate you on the strength of your fingers and wrists. You had me there, without a doubt."

She had moved a step or two back, and now stood glancing alternately at me, and at the revolver, which I had placed on the balustrade before us. There was a world of unvoiced curiosity in her eyes.

"Why did you pull it out of your pocket so suddenly?" she demanded, with something like asperity. "I believe you were going to—no, I don't, though, because you said you weren't. But——"

"Thank you," I said. "But why did I pull the revolver out of my pocket? Well, I pulled the revolver out of my pocket because I wanted to look at it."

"I said—why did you pull it out so suddenly?" she said, staccato fashion.

"Why did I pull it out so suddenly?" I repeated. "Oh, because I thought of it suddenly."

She regarded me with bent brows and a pursed mouth. It was a very pretty mouth, and from what I could see of a face that was closely wrapped about by a diaphanous cloud of white, its owner was very pretty too. But I thought she was somewhat angry, for she was beating a small pointed toe upon the gravel.

"That seems a lame sort of excuse," she said severely. "Is it a common thing for a man to pull a revolver out of his pocket very suddenly unless he is going to use it on himself or somebody else?"

"I should say not," I replied. "But I think I can give you an illustration which will make my meaning clear. Have you never, when going out shopping, for instance, suddenly said, 'By jove, where's my purse?' and stuck your hand in your pocket and pulled it out?—that is, if it was there?"

She smiled—then laughed softly.

"No," she said. "I don't think I can truthfully say that, that particular experience has ever been mine—But your illustration is apt and explanatory—I am beginning to understand you. You pulled the revolver out because you suddenly thought of it—not because you were going to make use of it."

I shook my head.

"I didn't say that I wasn't going to make use of it," I replied. "I am hoping to make really good use of it—it is a beautiful weapon."

The clouds of suspicion descended upon her brow.

"I like people who say what they mean," she observed.

"Then you must like me tremendously," I returned, "because so far I have said exactly what I do mean."

"How can you make use of a revolver without shooting something?" she asked, with another touch of asperity. "Perhaps you were going to shoot—cats?"

"The revolver is unloaded," I replied. "There is not a cartridge in it. Yet I hope to put it to excellent use—tomorrow."

Her eyebrows arched themselves. I picked up the revolver, and laid it across the palm of my hand.

"Look at it," I said, extending it towards her. "It is of very beautiful workmanship, of the most perfect materials, and most exquisitely and extravagantly mounted. Take it in your hand. I give you my word it is not loaded."

She took the weapon in her hands, and examined it with some curiosity. And as she glanced it over, turning it this way and that in the mingled light of moon and lamps, I examined her. She was little more than a girl, twenty, I should think, at the outside; of a sufficient stature, slim, delicately and prettily proportioned. Her eyes, as I knew already, were grey; her hair, from what I could see of a stray lock or two

"I am debating that point at present," I said. "No, I think I shall not. Fortune has not been kind—why try to cajole an indifferent mistress? Much better cast about for a new one, more complaisant."

"Have you lost a lot of money at the tables?" she inquired, still inquisitive.

"A mere trifle in the eyes of a rich man—a fortune in the estimation of a beggar. But why speak of the past? Did it never strike you that the most sensible proverb in our language is that which points out to us the uselessness of crying over spilled milk? It has the genuine essence of wisdom."

"I thought," she said, with charming irrelevance, "that most gamblers when they lost their last penny at Monte Carlo were foolish enough to shoot themselves. That was why——"

"You took me into custody. And that reminds me that I have not yet thanked you for——"

"But there is nothing to thank me for, since your intention was not what I hastily took it to be, and——"

"The important matter," I said gravely, "is the genuine nature of your intention. For you had good reason to believe that I was about to shoot myself, and you very bravely endeavoured to prevent me from the accomplishment of such a rash deed. I certainly think it my duty to thank you most sincerely and with gratitude."

She shot a quick glance at me.

"You have a half-mocking way of saying things," she said, and I think her lips assumed the prettiest of pouts. "I believe you are a cynic."

"On the contrary, I am the lightest-hearted philosopher under the sun. I am a true disciple of Omar Khayyam. If I seem to sneer it is that I may not laugh outright. To me, life is what the old tent-maker rightly termed it—a chequer-board. I am one of the chequers. Therefore——"

I opened my hands in an appropriate gesture. After all, there are worse things than talking philosophy, under a Mediterranean moon, with a pretty and unknown—young woman.

"I do not believe that you would be satisfied with a crust of bread in the wilderness," she said with some point.

"I would be satisfied with what the poet said would satisfy him," I replied. "You will remember that in addition to the bread there was wine, and women, and joyous verse—we will

at any rate suppose that the verse was to be joyous. Women, wine and song—I wonder if Dr. Martin Luther ever read Omar?—he appears to have agreed with the Oriental. But that is a question for scholars, and I am not one.”

My companion paused—I paused too.

“Since I am sure that you are safe,” she said, with an inscrutable smile “and are not going to do any harm with your revolver, I will disappear as suddenly as I appeared. Good-night, sir.”

I bowed low.

“I do thank you most sincerely for your kindness of intention,” I said gravely. “If—if I really had contemplated shooting myself—I mean if I actually had been about to do so, it was a plucky thing of you to do. Thank you, once more.”

She nodded her head, and she laughed a little.

“I hope you will have luck with the pistols,” she said moving away. “Do not allow the Bernstein to beat you down. And don’t go back to the tables.”

She nodded, smiled, and turned away. Our interview, then, was at an end. Should I ever see her again?

I made a sudden step to her side.

“Madam!” I exclaimed.

She turned, glancing at me with some surprise. I bowed my head—contritely.

“I have been telling you fibs,” I said. “Real genuine fibs. I was not going to shoot myself, nor anybody else, nor am I going to sell my beautiful pistols to Bernstein. The truth is that I am an expert shot with the revolver—I bought these weapons to-day—and I was just wondering when you came upon me if I could hit the ace of spades at thirty paces with my newly acquired possessions. The rest was—wicked invention.”

She gazed at me with widening eyes and parted lips. At last she spoke.

“Why did you keep me talking—and waiting, all that time?” she asked, with a becoming indignation.

“Your voice is very—sweet,” I said humbly, “and its owner is—very—shall I say, sympathetic.”

She sighed—of the exact value and nature of the sigh I could not say anything definite.

“I am going home,” she said, withdrawing a step or two. “I shall meditate.”



"Yes?" I said. "On——?"

"On the craft and subtlety of man," she answered. "Good-night."

"But there is to-morrow," I urged. "May I not——?"

"Have the opportunity of telling me more fibs?" she questioned.

"I can speak the truth—admirably," I replied in my gravest tones. "It is my normal condition."

"I should like to hear you in your normal condition," she said with equal gravity.

"I trust that you will never hear me in anything but my normal condition," I said. "Though it is quite true that I have a pretty invention."

She laughed and moved away slowly. I followed.

"Before morning," I said, "I shall have invented a means whereby we can resume our discussions—having regard to strict propriety. But—your presence will be needed."

"Eleven o'clock is an hour of great convenience for many things," she murmured.

"And this," I said, glancing about me, "is an ideal meeting-place."

"But you must be in your normal condition," she said. "I shall be—inquisitive."

"I will be as an open book," I promised.

"I wonder what I shall read in it?" she said musingly.

"At any rate," I implored, "you will turn a page or two?"

She bowed her head very graciously, and favoured me with a curtsy that would have done credit to an eighteenth-century ancestor. I saluted her with becoming reverence. She flashed a demure farewell from her grey eyes—and was gone.

"I should not wonder," said I to myself as I turned the corner of the Casino in the opposite direction—"I should not wonder at all if I discover myself to be in love. For she is certainly a fascinating and sweet personality. Heigho!—what it is to be impressionable."

As I put the revolver safely away in its case that night in my room at the Hotel de Paris I remembered that she had handled it. I am afraid that I saluted the place whereat her slim fingers had touched its shining surface. The glamour of the moonlight was still upon it—and also upon me.

Next morning I breakfasted in the *salle à manger* with Major

Ponsonby of the Blues. He is a well-preserved gentleman of fifty who knows everybody, and much more about them than they know themselves. To breakfast with him is to learn many things which are not in the newspapers, daily or weekly.

In the midst of Ponsonby's chatter I chanced to look up from my studied contemplation of the table-cloth. A cold chill, followed by a hot flush, as of a summer wind blowing from the westward, shot over and through me. To my right, a dream of exquisite morning girlish perfection, she sat. She was more charming than ever. With her was an elderly, clean-shaven, gold-eye-glassed gentleman, and another lady, youthful, but of a discreet plainness. It flashed across me that all three might be Americans. Yet she had no Yankee twang in her pretty voice.

"Ponsonby," I said softly, "you know everybody and everything—who are those people at the table in the window on our right?"

Ponsonby by a strategic movement made an inspection.

"Oh, ah, yes," he said. "Americans, and arrived yesterday. Father, one Columbus O'Connell Mooney, Chicago, pork-packer and multi-millionaire. Pretty girl—Miss Diamond Mooney, daughter and sole heiress. Plain girl—Miss Sadie Grant, companion."

"I wish I was a pork-packer," I sighed.

"Excellent, if greasy business," said Ponsonby. "Lots of oof in it."

I looked her way—she, at last, looked mine. Our eyes met. We preserved a magnificent indifference. But I knew we should meet at eleven o'clock.

She was there to the minute—alone. She was prettier than ever, but there was a trace of sadness in her eyes.

"It is a long, long time since breakfast," I said, as we met.

"Exactly an hour and five minutes," she said.

We sat down, gazed at the blue of the Mediterranean, and the red brown of Monaco, and we were silent.

"Well?" she said at last.

"Well?" said I.

"You appear," she remarked, "you appear to be—thoughtful."

"You," I said, "appear to be pensive."

"That perhaps is because we are not under the influence of the moon," she observed.

"This, however, is perfect sunlight," I said.

"In the moonlight we did not know each other," she said.

"Do we now?" I asked.

She sighed, and traced a pattern in the gravel with the tip of her tiny shoe.

"Major Ponsonby," she said, "has been smoking again with my papa—since breakfast."

"Ah," said I. "The deuce he has!"

"I am pleased," she continued, "to have saved the most noble the Marquis of Despard, in the Peerage of Ireland, from—selling his revolver. I wish I could cure him of telling fibs."

Then there was a long silence.

"Will you take me in hand—and have a good try?" I said at last.

Then there was a longer silence.

"Perhaps I may," she said eventually. "Meanwhile—come and be presented to my papa."

And so there is going to be another bond of union between the American democracy and the British aristocracy—thanks to the revolver.

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